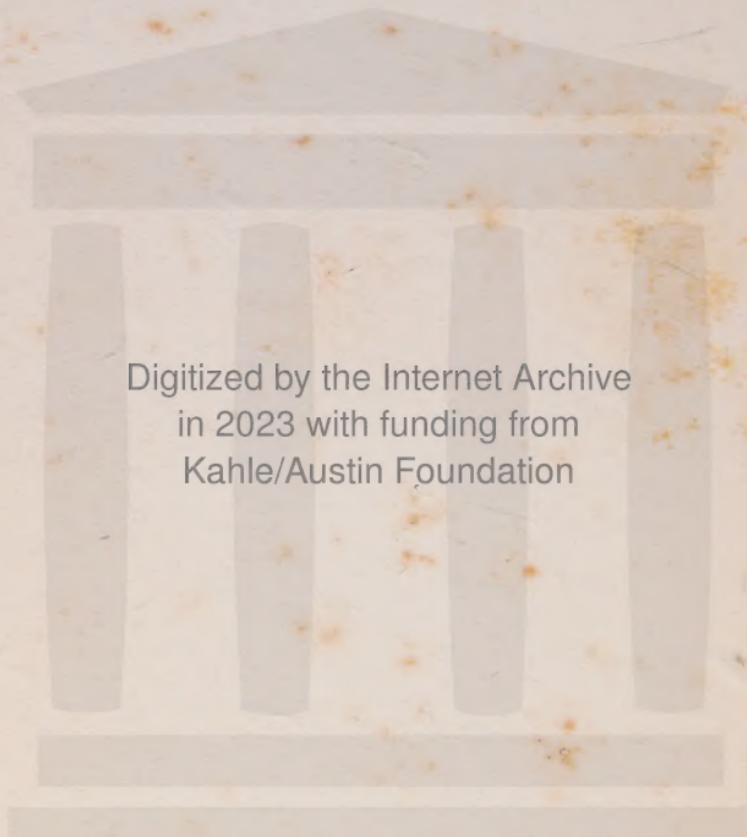


THE CONNING-TOWER
OF THE SOUL

HENRY HOWARD



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**THE CONNING-TOWER OF
THE SOUL**



THE CONNING-TOWER OF THE SOUL

BY

HENRY HOWARD

AUTHOR OF

'THE RAIMENT OF THE SOUL' 'THE SUMMITS OF THE SOUL'
'THE SHEPHERD PSALM' ETC.

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THE CONNING-TOWER OF THE SOUL

I

A

STUDY I

Keeping fast your hold on faith and a good conscience. Some there are who have thrown the latter overboard, and so have in shipwreck lost the former.—I TIM. i. 19 (Dr. Way's version).

THIS is a very picturesque and striking figure of speech. Under the cover of a nautical illustration Paul is seeking to show that there can be no violation of the moral sense without all-round wreckage and loss. This is sound philosophy, and true to the facts of life. Man's nature is a unity. Though his faculties have been differentiated, and grouped under separate heads as physical, intellectual, and moral, this grouping must not be understood to imply that members of each group are in any way partitioned off from one another. Of course it may be convenient for purpose of thought and discussion to make these distinctions ; but it must always be remembered that they are purely arbitrary. So closely intertwined and so intimately related are our different faculties, that it becomes impossible to refer any voluntary action exclusively to either group. In other words, to

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adopt Paul's fine figure, if conscience is thrown overboard, the ship of our life will drift inevitably to its doom, and in the general break-up, 'Faith,' which stands for our whole moral cargo, will go by the board.

The phrase 'thrown overboard,' which occurs in Dr. Way's translation of this verse, implies an act of violence to conscience that marks the close of a moral conflict. It need not be supposed that any who may read these lines have dealt so roughly with their moral pilot as thus to have thrown him over the side; but we need to guard against the first steps in a process if we do not wish to take the last. Ends are folded up in beginnings, and in the tiny seed of the present the boundless harvests of the future lie cradled and concealed. Then there is the law of momentum always at work. Velocity is easily acquired and hard to overcome. The initial stage of this process is usually entered through the gate of simple neglect. Neglect, whether in the physical, mental, or moral realm, always carries its appropriate penalty.

The faculty that is allowed to fall into disuse is first smitten with weakness, and finally confiscated. The moral sense that is allowed to remain in a rudimentary stage deteriorates and finally disappears. This is an inevitable law, and it holds

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inexorably in all the kingdoms of life. The neglect of conscience, which is merely negative, is invariably followed by the positive step of corrupting its verdicts. All are guilty more or less of playing fast and loose with the moral sense—of tampering with the inward monitor. We have first of all smitten it deaf, dumb, blind; and then, forsooth, because no warning voice has been heard from within, we have concluded that our course was clear. This is tantamount to the folly of supposing that to destroy the danger-signal is equivalent to having a clear line.

Whatever may be true in business, let it be a guiding principle that in morals first thoughts are best. There must be no debate. It is not the function of conscience to discuss but to decide, and from its decisions there must be no appeal to the court of expediency or of desire. Instead, however, of accepting the indications of the moral register, we desire to alter its readings. We want at will to make black white, and the paths of duty and desire to change places or coincide. And the tragedy is, that a man may thrust out a true conscience and replace it by one that is false. If, instead of accepting the decisions of this inner court, we cast about to reverse its judgements, we become the victims of illusion. But right and

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wrong remain unalterably the same, however much we may tamper with our perception of them. We might as well try to effect a change of weather by manipulating the barometer as to make right and wrong change places in the moral order of things by tampering with conscience.

In this passage the Apostle Paul throws upon the individual soul the responsibility of correctly interpreting and loyally obeying the inner voice that speaks for God and Duty. This inner voice is conscience, and conscience has a two-fold function to discharge: to discriminate between right and wrong, in the multitude of candidates which seek the suffrage of the will; and to insist that the right shall be followed, and the wrong shunned. This magisterial deliverance is one of the organic instincts of human nature, and there is no question that it can be trained to the finest degree of acuteness, or deadened till it feels no throb of pain.

We are all more or less morally lop-sided. We have each our weak point. On one side of our nature we are like granite, against which temptation hurls itself in vain. On another we are like cheese, and crumble away incontinently, even at the mere sight of means to do ill deeds. Character is in some directions as tough as sail-cloth, while in

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others it frays out like liberty-silk. And the trouble is that we deceive ourselves into thinking that by reefing up tightly on the one side, we can atone for looseness on the other. We have played such tricks upon ourselves that we have more or less become the victims of illusion, and fall to sleep under a false sense of moral security.

But even in the case of those who have succeeded to all seeming in deadening the moral nerve, conscience has been found suddenly to return to its judicial place and power. It would appear that no matter to what depths a man may descend, he cannot sin himself beyond the pale and possibility of remorse. It has of course been said that there is no moral quality or value in remorse, though why this should be so unquestioningly taken for granted is difficult to understand. In the case of many a great offender there has set in a tide of mental revulsion against the wrong committed which must have carried with it certain moral elements, and therefore elements of hope.

It cannot be that God will ever quench the faintest spark of moral sensibility in man. He must seek to feed and reinforce it, for it is the way of hope, and He is the God of Hope. Because His love is infinite, His hope must be eternal. Because His mercy endureth for ever, His love can never

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despair. Once we realize that conscience is merely the local expression of a universal principle, or better still, perhaps, the local representative of a universal Personality, we perceive how utterly futile must be any attempt to deflect this universal principle by merely corrupting the inner and local verdicts. The law of righteousness is not merely a dead, cold, and inoperative statute, standing over against our lives with its awful sanctions and its inexorable imperatives. It is a living and self-effectuating energy working everywhere and always towards moral recovery and rectification. Conscience is simply one of the many points of its manifestation, one of its many working ends. What folly, then, to suppose that because, forsooth, one has stifled the inner voice, he has therefore silenced the thunders of Sinai, of which that voice was merely the echo ! How vain to suppose that by quenching the inner beam of kindly light, he has succeeded in darkening the solar system from which it proceeds ! However much the Hindus may pollute the sacred Ganges, they can never stain the everlasting snows that perpetually feed its force and flow. For ever fresh in their virginal purity, the chaste, white snowflakes continue to fall from the hands of God. So with the great forces of righteousness that stream out from His Infinite Per-

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sonality: however much they may be deflected and defiled as they enter and pass through the fields of human thought and desire, yet clear as crystal they continue to descend from the throne of God and of the Lamb, keeping their ancient purity unstained; and by bearing their witness to the absolute Holiness from which they proceed, they become a silent and perpetual rebuke to such as resist them, and a purifying energy in such as submit themselves to their power.

We have seen that the unalterable and incorruptible standards of morality remain, no matter what local deviations from them we may make. We can no more accommodate them to our conduct than we can adjust the solar system to the vagaries of our watches. The watches of the world must be set by the sun, and the clock of conscience has to be regulated by the constellations of the moral sky. Every man is at liberty to keep his own watch; but unless he wishes to become the laughing-stock of the community he had better not try to keep his own time. If he would meet his business and social engagements he must observe common time. Let him endeavour to run the business of the city, and control the town-clock and the railways, by his fallible time-piece, and he will not only provoke the scorn of his fellows, but the very stars in their

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courses will put him to shame, and the sun in the heavens give him the lie.

The moral is that the local must line up with the universal, for the great laws of righteousness cannot be made to deviate a hair's breadth from their course. All the misery that sets in on the track of our misdeeds has this for its moral end and aim : to bring us into line—to make us afraid of getting out of step with the moral order. But one of the most dire effects of sin is the paralysis of this fear. Now to have the sense of fear blunted, so that warnings and premonitions fall unheeded on the ear, exposes the soul unguarded to the assaults of wrong. This is of course a condition of advanced moral deterioration. A man must have gone a long way in evil before this stage could have been reached. But then our text is setting forth an extreme case, and every case will become extreme if not taken in hand. Fear is a divinely implanted sense, but like every other sense it may become dulled, with the result that every day voluntary risks may be incurred and danger signals ignored. Darwin tells us that he had acquired, in common with most men, the habit of starting back at the sudden approach of danger, and that no amount of will-power would enable him to keep his face pressed against the plate glass of the cobra's cage in the Zoo

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while the reptile struck at him. He said that even though he exerted the full force of his will, and though his reason told him that there was absolutely nothing to fear, he every time drew back from the stroke. But there can be little doubt that had the great naturalist only persisted, in time he would have acquired the power of facing the cobra without flinching ; for here, as indeed everywhere, familiarity would have bred contempt.

It is this contempt of danger in the moral world that constitutes the greatest danger of all. Under its influence courses are pursued which conscience wholly condemns, and yet to which by some evil sorcery we consent to be seduced. A spell is woven about the spirit, that throws it into a kind of moral stupor. It is as though the will were chloro-formed into quiescence, if not into acquiescence with wrong. If it does not consent, at least it does not resent its advances. By some strange enchantment, as soon as we enter the zone of temptation a numbness steals over our moral senses.

Together with the keen anticipation of the pleasure of sin, there sets in a corresponding dullness in the faculty of forecasting its subsequent pain. We know the pain must follow, for it always has followed, and we feel that, if we could but induce it beforehand as keenly as we can the anticipated pleasure

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of our self-gratification, then we should have power to put it beneath our feet. But the maximum of anticipated satisfaction meets the minimum of anticipated pain, and everything is forgotten save the enjoyment of the moment. We yield ourselves up to the immediate impulse without regard to the remote result. Then when the exhilaration is over, and the nervous reaction sets in ; when the sated physical sense would fain seek refuge in repose, the belated moral sense wakes up, and so torments the mind that everything is spoilt. Who among us has not been plunged into this hell of fruitless regret ? Who has not said, 'Why did not conscience speak sooner ? ' The answer is that it did. 'O but why did it not inflict its penalty ? ' The reply is that it could not till the wrong had been done. What we need is, not merely a judgement on the moral quality of our wrong steps before they have been taken, but a foretaste of the misery that will be afterwards entailed. To supply this, however, is not the function of conscience, but of reason and imagination. This result can be produced only as, by an effort of will, we project the mind beyond the committal of the guilty act, and while it is yet only in contemplation, so as to bring forward into the present a vision of the moral consequences that must inevitably ensue. By some fatal action of

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the mind, doubtless as the result of playing fast and loose with conscience, there drops down between the pleasure of sin and its pain a temporary veil shutting off from view the hell of remorse to which we are moving, until the forbidden frontier has been crossed and the forbidden fruit has been plucked. Then what was sweetness in the mouth turns to gall and bitterness within ; the hideous memory of which not even the after-sweetness of forgiveness seems able wholly to remove.

The strange thing in morals is this quick recovery of the will after having capitulated. Hardly has it gone over to the side of evil, and gratified its wrongful desire, than it springs back in revulsion and sides with conscience against its own defection. As long as there is this healthy moral reaction there is hope of moral restoration. Indeed, that gracious Spirit who is everywhere and always waiting for opportunities of moral salvage has often, by taking advantage of this moment of moral rebound, succeeded in carrying the soul over to the side of righteousness with a strength of determination and an enthusiasm for goodness that without its previous experience in sin it might never have acquired. The moment of greatest moral peril in a man's history is when he can do wrong with impunity, when no compunction follows in the wake of his

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wickedness, but when, on the contrary, reasons are sought and adduced in extenuation of the wrong. The chances of moral recovery in such a case are immeasurably reduced. Persistence in evil practices results in an unconscious accommodation of the moral nature to a lower ethical standard. Just as the physical nature in some constitutions may acquire what is known in medicine as 'tolerance of poison,' so that what would seriously injure or even kill an ordinary person, leaves them, if not unharmed, at least unconscious of damage ; so in the moral system it would seem to be possible to induce tolerance of sin, so that wrong can be committed without pain or protest, and the soul be made to adjust itself to evil without moral distress.

In George Eliot's *Romola* we have this principle of perversion worked out to its final and fatal issue. There are certain great works of fiction that should be read once a year because of the moral tonic they impart, and this is one. Here is an illustration of how a single lie persisted in will falsify the whole nature, infecting every relationship of life with its deadly virus, till, from the sole of the foot to the crown, there is not left a single square inch of truth from which to start a new and clean career. Here we have the great novelist at her best, and dealing at first-hand with great basic principles

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which have their root and origin in the everlasting righteousness of God. Listen to one of her profoundest reflections, which, when read in the light of her own life-history, is felt not only to be quick with moral life, but to quiver with moral pain : ‘ Under every guilty secret there is hidden a brood of guilty wishes whose unwholesome infecting life is cherished by the darkness. The contaminating effect of deeds often lies less in the commission than in the consequent adjustment of our desires—the enlistment of our self-interest on the side of falsity.’

The fact is that in morals, as in physics, there is an inevitable tendency to equilibrium. This law is ever at work adjusting the balance between belief and practice, and seeking to make creed and conduct correspond. It is a law that abhors any tilt in the moral scale-beam ; and when it cannot bring conduct up to the level of conscience, it seeks to degrade conscience to the level of conduct. Paul’s notion of conscience, as indicated by our text, was that of an outlook-man on the prow of a vessel, whose duty it was to keep an eye keenly alert against the possibility of mishap. It was his business to scan the sea for reefs and shoals, and report every newly-sighted sail to those who steered the ship ; keeping them apprised of every landmark as it came into view, and notifying every portent of the

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tell-tale sky, that he might be able to give swift intimation of approaching ill. The importance of all this is too obvious to require stating.

In the evolution of naval science, the most modern and up-to-date expression of this necessity for a keen look-out and a completely equipped intelligence centre is the conning-tower of an ironclad. This is the shot-proof observation turret, from which, while the vessel is in action, the officer in charge issues his commands, upon obedience to which the success of the engagement entirely depends. Even the mercantile marine and the great passenger fleets of the world have their man posted on the 'look-out,' and a very important post it is.

What it meant in Paul's day, when there were no charts, compasses, barometers, or revolving shore-lights, it would be difficult to overstate. Doubtless then, as now, there would be men of special fitness with finely trained vision, who could command almost any price for their services by reason of their native gifts and acquired knowledge of the sea and sky. What madness it would mean to any captain to ignore the watch that warned of danger near ! It is inconceivable that any master of a craft would thus expose his vessel to needless risk. For his own safety's sake and that of his passengers

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and crew, to say nothing of the cargo, he would feel bound by every moral and material consideration to take the utmost precaution against loss. Every moment of every hour, by night and day, he would have some one on watch, keeping sleepless vigil against the dangers of the deep. He would have but one anxiety, that of bringing his vessel safely to port. No one but a captain bereft of reason would ignore, much less abuse or throw overboard, one upon whose clear vision and accurate judgement he depended for the safety of his ship. But what ship or cargo can compare with that over which conscience, the moral look-out, has been placed in charge? 'Faith' in this verse is the generic term for everything that has moral worth. What strange madness is this, then, that, resisting and even resenting the warnings of the moral look-out, runs the vessel of life on the breakers to a swift and certain doom, so that honour, truth, purity, peace of mind, self-respect, and the confidence of one's fellows, all go by the board—enriching none by the victim's loss, but making him poor indeed?

Yet so common is this madness that it almost ceases to be strange. With a measure of this insanity we are all infected. Who among us can plead 'Not guilty' to the charge of tampering with conscience, corrupting its verdicts and hushing

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its voice? And the irony is that we can by our own wilfulness render nugatory all the warnings from within, so that when conscience has done its work honestly and well, it may all turn out to be vain, the fact being that conscience cannot enforce the law it has laid down. Or, preserving the metaphor of the text, conscience cannot both spy out and report the danger, and at the same time navigate the ship. When conscience has taken the moral bearings and handed in its report, its work for the time is finished. It is then the duty of the will to act upon its advice. In the vessel of life the will is captain, and on his own ship the captain must be supreme. Like every other captain, of course he is responsible to the owners, but in the control of his vessel from port to port he is in absolute command. This explains why there are so many moral mishaps in life; it is because conscience and will are at cross-purposes and not co-ordinate. Even conscience has no power to coerce the will. On the contrary, the will has power to dispose of conscience even to the extent of casting it over the side. What is needed, then, is not so much the knowledge of duty as the will to obey. It is not so much in our moral discrimination that we are at fault as in our moral disposition, though it is true that these mutually react on one another. We are weak

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in the region of the will. We perceive more than we perform. We all know more of truth and goodness than we ever embody in life. We have a long way to go in duty before we catch up with our knowledge. Though, strange to say, declining to do, we cease to know. Duty refused results in duty confused. Darkness, or at least twilight, always sets in on disloyalty. In moral twilight things are difficult to discern. Right and wrong in the dusk seem strangely alike, and melt into one another, just as in certain lights earth and sky appear to mingle so that we cannot for the life of us distinguish where the one leaves off and the other begins. But these, after all, are mere illusions that play only about the border-line. Whatever misconceptions we may form as to the far horizon, we have never any doubt as to which is earth and which is sky at the spot where we stand. And by the time we have covered the distance between ourselves and the apparently doubtful line, that too will have likewise cleared.

So with right and wrong, it is only when we have our eye fixed upon forbidden frontiers that we become morally mystified. Here and now, where we stand, we are never in doubt; for in the moral world, however dark the night may be, there is always light enough for the next step, and that one

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taken, for the next, because the path clears as we tread it. As a matter of fact, when our will is set to do the will of God, we light up our track from within. The certainties of conduct are numerous enough and clear enough for us all. It is only when we do dubious things, and betray a preference for doubt in the place of certainty, that we become the victims of illusion. Instead of walking in the light as God is in the light, we tread the shades where moral shapes become distorted and moral colour is confused. By our own laxity of conduct we induce defective moral vision, and these two keep up a sort of reciprocal interaction, which unless arrested will reduce the life to moral chaos, so that evil becomes its law. Such a life is a derelict on the waters of time, and, unless boarded by another and taken in hand, must drift to the shores of doom. Be loyal above all things to conscience—the inner voice that speaks for God and duty. Conscience can do no more for you than it has done; your will must now come to the rescue. Changing for the moment the metaphor of the text, conscience is like the railway-signalman who flashes the red light of danger on the track of the on-rushing train. It can do no more. It is not the business of the signalman to come down from his box, climb on to the foot-plate of the engine, grasp the levers, shut

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the throttle, and apply the brakes. That is the business of the driver. So in your life conscience is the signalman, but the driver is the will, and the will alone can shut down the brakes and reverse the gear. To every one is given this power, for it is the power to repent. Christ has been 'exalted a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance unto Israel, and the remission of sins.' However morally mixed your life has been, however crooked the past, bring it to Him, and He will straighten it out, and cleanse it from stain. He will put His shoulder under the burden of your guilt, and answer for you in the Day of God.

STUDY II

Teach me Thy way, O Lord; I will walk in Thy truth. Unite my heart to fear Thy name.—Ps. lxxxvi. 11.

They being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.—Rom. x. 3.

ALTHOUGH we have changed the text, our theme is still the same. If it be true that the moral mishaps of life are due to conscience and will being at cross-purposes, then until these two are harmonized there can be no mental peace or moral progress. In this connexion there are two scriptures which have a most important bearing on the theme we are discussing.

In the first of the passages quoted above the psalmist is conscious that the unity of life has been broken. It is first of all a prayer that conscience may be divinely instructed: ‘Teach me Thy way, O Lord.’ This is followed by a pledge that the track then indicated by the instructed conscience shall be loyally taken by the will: ‘I will walk in Thy truth.’ Then, as if reminded by past failure of the will’s frequent refusal to respond to the

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'one clear call' of conscience, whereby these two were put in opposite camps, and life hopelessly divided against itself, he prays for their unification : 'Unite my heart to fear Thy name.'

All the discord and tragedy in life spring out of this divorce between will and conscience. Rightly to relate them is to restore the lost harmony. To make them mutually reciprocal is the only way of peace. When the will is keyed to conscience, unity of personality is reached, without which the highest moral efficiency can never be attained. As long as duty and desire hold divided territory within us, and keep up incessant warfare, we can never become or achieve our best. Once, however, they are unified, we can command and direct all our forces at a moment's notice to a given point ; and, though we may fail of our end, we shall not be cast in moral blame. There is no condemnation to the man whose purpose is fixed in right, although in performance he may fail. We shall not be judged by our output in the way of work, but by our disposition in the way of will. Not upon quantity, but upon quality, will the verdict turn. This question of judgement presupposes a standard, and it is this matter of a standard that our second text brings into view. The translation is unfortunate, or this would be clearer. Dr. Way's render-

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ing conveys the true sense of the original : 'They steadily ignore the righteousness which God demands. They try to set up a private standard of righteousness, and so have practically rebelled against the righteousness of God.'

We have already seen that conscience is an internal judgement-seat before which we arraign ourselves and pronounce upon the quality of our intentions. But this inner tribunal is not final. We must dismiss the idea, if we ever held it, that the internal justification of our conduct necessarily proves it right, or even that an internal condemnation necessarily proves it wrong. With regard to the latter, the Apostle John assures us that 'even if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart'; while in reference to the former there are two autobiographical notes on the part of the Apostle Paul which in this connexion it is important to remember. In Acts xxiii., when before the Sanhedrin, he declared, 'I have lived before God in all good conscience until this day.' This meant that all the time he was persecuting the Christians and 'breathing out threatening and slaughter' against the Church of Christ, he stood not only uncondemned, but vindicated, if not applauded, by this inner judge. Again in 1 Cor. iv., he writes, 'I know nothing against myself, and yet am I

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not hereby justified. He that examineth me is the Lord.' Now, it is clear from these scriptures that conscience is not the final arbiter as to conduct, any more than our own weights and scales are the final arbiter in any dispute as to shortage in the goods we sell. The final appeal in such a case is to the incorruptible standard of the Crown. Indeed, conscience has infinitely less chance of being right than a pair of scales. Every pair of scales before being sold is officially tested and approved. It is not permitted to pass out into the world of commerce until it has been adjusted to the required standard. Nor is that a once-for-all authorization ; for as long as it is in use it has to be submitted to periodical inspection and test. But conscience is subject to all the accidents of transmitted tendency. It is not as though each personality at birth stepped clean out from the hand of God, as a new and original creation, unrelated to the past, with a brand-new moral outfit of guaranteed accuracy, and the mark of its heavenly ancestry stamped upon its brow. On the contrary, every man is one of a series which for tens of thousands of years have been working their way, now upward, and now downward, in the scale of moral being. He is the converging point of a million unguessed forces, good, bad, and

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indifferent, which have met and mingled in his single life. Tennyson represents Ulysses as declaring, 'I am a part of all that I have met'; and this is true of every man. We have, each one of us, without our consent, become the confluence of opposing streams of tendency which struggle in us for the mastery. We are the centres of conflicting forces, which make our bodies and brains the battle-ground on which they match their competing powers. With one or other of these we are compelled to side. The choice we make determines the moral issue of the struggle; for we alone, not fate, nor heredity, nor any predominating pressure from without, but we alone in our own persons, hold the balance of power. Once we cast our will into the scale of either right or wrong, the conflict acquires a moral significance. Up till then we do not really come into it, although we have furnished the field for the struggle. But when we cease merely to provide the field, and contribute to the fight, we declare ourselves. Thenceforth we become morally committed, and life moves upward or downward in the moral scale.

For good or evil, life follows the will. But the will would be at a manifest disadvantage amid the clamour of competing candidates for its suffrage, were it not for the still small voice of

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conscience, whose function it is to instruct and advise. But what if conscience, through inherited prejudice, as in the case of Paul, should wrongly advise? Then, disastrous though the results may be, the agent is absolved from moral wrong. Listen to the great Apostle as he puts his own case to Timothy: 'I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that He counted me faithful, putting me into this ministry, who before was a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious, but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.' And lest any man should say that this was an exceptional case, and must not be quoted as a precedent, Paul goes on to say; '*For this very cause I obtained mercy, that in me as chief of sinners, Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering, as a sample to them which should hereafter believe in Him unto eternal life.*' It is clear, then, that it is the business of conscience to decide what should be done, but not what shall be done. That is left absolutely to the will, upon which the responsibility of all voluntary action must finally rest. But the will, like the conscience, is entangled in the mesh of inheritance, so that we come into the world with not only defective moral discernment, but with defective moral determination. Indeed, defective will-power rather than defective

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intelligence seems to be our prevailing trouble. The indisposition to do what we know results in a lowering of one's ideal to the level of one's actual. Instead of bringing performance up to the standard, there is a reduction of the standard to performance.

This is the thought of the second text and the kind of action that it condemns. It is the tendency of human nature to set up an individual in the place of a universal standard, and thus to become a law unto itself. Men try to set up a private standard of righteousness. This English word 'righteousness,' like the Greek equivalent which it translates, is a doublet as to meaning. It comprises both the wit to know what is right and the will to do it. 'Righteousness' is a contraction of 'Right-wiseness,' which beautifully blends and expresses this twofold thought of Perception and Performance. It is thus more than mere 'rightness,' for a man might be right without even knowing or intending it. But 'righteousness' is being right, with both knowledge and intent. We have seen that Paul was exculpated on the ground that he was conforming to his own standard of right, which up till then was the best he knew.

After the revelation, however, on the Damascus road, for him to have continued in his course of

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persecution would have plunged him into moral guilt. The revelation of the highest thus becomes more than a revelation ; it is a call. It lays its imperative upon us. ' We needs must love the highest when we see it.' It is the preference of the lower in the presence of the higher that is condemned by our text, and which casts the soul in moral blame. The deviation of the local standard from the universal would not be so serious, were it not that by some strange law we lose our consciousness of the deviation, or at least become content with it.

If conscience unerringly and uncompromisingly measured the distance between requirement and performance, then the widening interval would distress us ; it would, so to speak, get on our moral nerves and call a halt. But the mischief is that with our departure from the line of duty the line itself appears to deflect with us, the inward standard accommodates itself to the outward conduct, so that we are deceived as to our moral whereabouts. We have no ' bump of locality ' ; we lose our sense of being off our course, and unconsciously drift to our doom. What is needed is that we shall submit our standard to that of the divine, so as to have its native and acquired deviation corrected and standardized.

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Herein lies the necessity for a correct and incorruptible standard for the regulation of life and conduct—a standard which, unlike the fallible human conscience, shall not be subject to the accidents of heredity, education, or environment, but remain at all times, in all places, and for all men unalterably the same.

An illustration of this necessity may be seen by working out a parallel between the conscience of a man and the compass of a ship. The text justifies this. We have a nautical text, and it is a fair thing to employ a nautical illustration. There are three ruling factors which bring about deviation or variation in a ship's compass, and they correspond in a remarkable manner to the three ruling factors which control the development of the moral faculty in man, viz., heredity, education, environment. Ships that are built in part or wholly of iron are strongly magnetic. This is due partly to the direction in which the ship lies while being built, and partly to the amount of hammering and twisting to which the iron has been subjected in the course of the ship's construction. The effect on a compass when placed in such a ship is to cause the magnetic needle to deviate by so much from the magnetic meridian. That deviation has to be carefully registered, or it may lead to the most

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disastrous results. Every ship, therefore, has its own personal magnetic equation, which has always to be allowed for in its navigation. This native deviation of the compass very finely corresponds with the influence on the conscience of heredity. The ship is born, so to speak, with a magnetic twist, and men are born with a moral twist. Deviation is woven into the very tissues of the human heart and brain. Of course, one might secure ideal conditions in which a ship would have no personal deviation, and you may sometimes discover a human being without moral bias. But we are dealing with the rule, not with its exceptions. Moral qualities within certain limits are all subject to the great law of inheritance, with the result that, as General Booth declares, 'there are human beings who are not so much born into this world as damned into it.' That is a strong thing to say, but he means that there are children whose criminal antecedents run back, it may be, through so many generations that the product may be called a condition of moral imbecility. They seem to be thrown out with a millstone of inherited tendency bound about their neck, and controlled by an unconquerable gravitation towards wrong.

Another factor which affects the compass of a

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ship is the cargo taken on board. Every one knows that a parcel of steel rails on board a ship will deflect the magnetic needle so that the captain, thinking he was sailing in a certain direction, has not noted this variation until he has found himself hundreds of miles from the point where he expected to be. This class of deviation corresponds finely with the influence on conscience of education. Are there not men who read these words who have taken on board disturbing cargo in the shape of wrong ideas about God, about man, about duty, about life (its relations and obligations), about death, and about the hereafter? The books read, the wrong conceptions adopted in regard to great moral questions, have not these affected the reading of conscience, and are they not farther away from the truth to-day through this unconscious deflection of their moral compass?

Again, something else affects the ship's compass, and that is the waters in which the vessel may sail. If you have studied a magnetic chart you will have noticed the magnetic currents that are marked. These currents differ in different oceans and latitudes, but they are all registered for the mariner. He knows when his ship is nearing an iron-bound coast, and he has to allow for the variations of the compass in consequence of the

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seas in which he sails. This corresponds to the influence on conscience of the environments we choose. We have frequently entered certain circles, pursued certain engagements, indulged in certain pastimes, and formed certain associations, that have deflected the moral sense. There are men far from God and rectitude, far from purity and truth, who have got there unconsciously by a process of moral drifting, through not having taken note of this inward variation.

‘Well,’ it may be asked, ‘what is a man to do if he cannot trust his own conscience?’ The reply is, that ‘he must check his conscience, even as the captain of a ship checks his compass.’

And here a most important truth emerges, and a still more beautiful analogy. No master-mariner trusts exclusively to his compass, but neither can he check its readings by a reference to those of other ships that he may meet, any more than we can hope to rectify our erring moral register by a comparison with those of our fellow men. The captain tests his compass not by a terrestrial but by a celestial standard. He takes the sun. And it is worthy of note that he takes it, not at dawn, when its level beams are lying across the face of the waters, but at noon, when it has reached its meridian height and splendour. He rectifies his readings then.

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And so with conscience. We must bring it to the Sun of Divine Revelation; and to that Sun, not away in the grey dawn of history, when even Abraham resorted to subterfuge, and Jacob was guilty of double-dealing. It may be that many, measuring their lives by those of the patriarchs, could give them points in ethical behaviour. But it is not by the imperfect light of those primitive days that we are to judge our conduct. For Revelation has been progressive, and the Old Testament ethic is after all but an initial code.

We come at length to the Sun of Revelation in its meridian splendour, when it gathers up its concentrated radiance in the life and character of our Incarnate Lord. How our deviation stands exposed when compared with His life! All human imperfections shrink abashed and confounded in the white radiance that outstreams from that character, which all the world acknowledges to be unique in personal purity and power.

In a disputed boundary case between the Australian States of Victoria and South Australia, the hearing of which was recently concluded, a striking illustration was brought to light of the necessity for an infallible standard. It appeared from the arguments of counsel that all the trouble with regard to the determination of the 141st

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meridian had arisen from the fact that the surveyor, Mr. Tyers, in 1839, used a nautical almanac which was subsequently discovered to be erroneous. The errors in this almanac had not been allowed for in the determination for the Sydney meridian, which was thus wrongly fixed. Instead, therefore, of starting with the Greenwich meridian, which was known to be correct, as the base-line of his calculations, Mr. Tyers accepted as correct the erroneous Sydney meridian and worked from it as his starting-point. In addition to this he failed to take a sufficient number of stars for his observations. The result was the inevitable one, which is giving so much inter-state trouble in the Commonwealth to-day. Starting with a defective standard, the whole of his work was vitiated, and his reputation for accuracy impugned, while for seventy-two years two sister States have been in perpetual dispute.

It thus appears that in the settlement of merely terrestrial boundaries reference has to be made to celestial and incorruptible standards. But if earth has to appeal to the heavens in the matter of frontier lines, where merely material interests are involved, what shall be said in regard to moral boundaries involving questions of conscience and conduct, the issues of which demand the eternities for their field ?

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For us to set our conduct by our conscience when conscience itself has first of all been deflected by conduct, is very much like checking one's watch by a clock to which the watch had previously given the incorrect time. Under such conditions there are endless possibilities of variation, with all the moral perils such variations involve. There is no sliding-scale in morality. The standard is fixed and irrevocable. It is the same for all men. There is no higher requirement for the minister of religion than for the Minister of the Crown ; for the employer than the employed. We all start from the same moral level, for, as Paul reminds us : 'There is no difference,' and we are all called to the same moral heights, 'for there is no respect of persons with God.' Just as the yard-measure must be the same for the huckster whose turnover is only a pound a day as for the manufacturer whose transactions run into tens of thousands in a year, so the divine measure is the same for us all, and is within reach of us all, from whatever level we may commence the ascent. For it is not by preference or privilege, but by faith. What the Apostle calls the 'righteousness which is of faith,' is a spirit of rectification that takes up its residence in the heart that submits to Christ's rule, and accepts the divine will as its law. Such

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a heart at once becomes the field of a new set of forces. A plus quantity comes into the life, which is as subtle and yet as effective as the entrance of magnetism into a piece of steel. It straightway polarizes all the affections, investing them with attractions towards right and repulsions against wrong.

This experience has been variously described by New Testament writers. 'Christ formed in you' is one of the pregnant phrases employed; the idea sought to be conveyed being that of a re-incarnation of Christ in the human soul that surrenders to His sway. It is the birth within the breast of a new life-principle, which forthwith becomes the regnant power, and straightway sets about reducing the hitherto lawless forces of life to loyalty to their rightful Lord. In another passage this experience is called 'Christ in you the hope of glory.' Now, when you have rendered the word 'glory' back into its constituent elements, it is found to stand for 'essential character,' the splendour of which in outward manifestation is simply the effluence of the inward moral condition, and not to be conceived of apart from its source, any more than the solar radiance is to be thought of apart from the sun. And just as the sun himself infinitely transcends in potential light his mere

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out-put in heat and radiance, so the inherent character of the sons of God infinitely outshines anything that merely appears.

The splendour of the summer sun as he rides the sky in his meridian might represents merely one thousand millionth part of his radiant heat and light. That is to say, if the light that streams from the noonday sun were divided up into a thousand million parts, one only of those parts would represent the earth's share in the output. But if you could gather up and concentrate all these thousand million parts, and bring them into view, even that would not be the sum of the sun's 'glory' in the New Testament sense of the word. It would be but its partial expression, because the sun is greater and grander than any manifestation of himself that he can make ; and that which he is, and not merely what he appears, is his 'glory' in the truest and deepest sense of that word. So with the human soul that has become the home of this divine and transfiguring force. The indwelling Christ becomes the source and fount of the soul's spiritual incandescence. But the visible radiance is as nothing when compared with the invisible potency. What that potency is doth not yet appear ; but when He who has begotten it shall appear, then the souls that only imperfectly express

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it here shall be lifted to their highest power of spiritual manifestation, and 'they shall be like Him, for they shall see Him as He is.'

From all this it will be clear that the righteousness of man must be checked by the standard righteousness of God. That standard has been translated for us from the abstract into the concrete in the life of our Lord Jesus Christ, who not only stands over against our lives to convict them of moral deviation by His own inflexible rectitude, but enters into them to correct, to redeem, and to transform. Christ does not merely incite to moral perfection, He empowers to it. The cure for all self-righteousness and Pharisaic pride is to be found in the contemplation of Christ. How He dwarfs into insignificance all the moral attainments of mere men ! Against His dazzling purity all our righteousness is indeed as 'filthy rags.'

There is a story told of a North of England woman who hung out her week's washing, and was so proud of its whiteness, till a snowstorm covered everything with its mantle of chastity. Then, seeing the garments which had been her pride an hour before thrown up by a background of ineffable purity, she exclaimed in despair: 'What can a poor woman do against God Almighty's snow ?' So in the white radiance of that life

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which is the light of men, we are led to exclaim, What can any man or woman do against the purity of God Almighty's Christ? Truly He works, in the hearts of those who fain would serve Him best, the deepest consciousness of deviation within.

Here, then, is God's standard, the requirement of which can never be relaxed. From self-evolved and self-imposed standards we can be self-released. Like little lads who fix their own jumps at convenient heights which they can easily clear, or lower as inclination may dictate, so we, instead of bringing our moral leap up to the level of the law, are all too prone to lower the law to the level of the leap. But just as no lad ever became a record-breaker who reduced the height to his performance, so no one will ever become a moral athlete who manipulates his ethical standard to meet his unethical mood. Once we shift from the absolute there is no safety. The right thing is the normal and natural in the true sense of that word. It is the wrong thing that is abnormal. This is clear from one consideration alone—that it separates conscience from conduct, placing them in two opposite camps, and thus dividing a man against himself. That which unifies a man, bringing will, conscience, reason, and desire all into line, and directing them all to the noblest ends, must

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be the 'natural' in the highest sense of that term. We have accustomed ourselves to the fallacy that sin is natural. It is nothing of the kind. To call it such is an abuse of the term 'natural,' and a misuse of the word 'sin.' But it is not only a mistake ; it is fraught with direst moral mischief ; because, instead of inciting us to struggle against the downward pull of evil, it begets acquiescence. This is fatal to all moral development, because it is only in the stress of struggle that character can unfold. To accept evil as our law is to submit to its sway. That is to throw the reins of restraint on the neck of our desires ; to give our bolting passions their head, and to let them gallop us to doom. On the other hand, to repudiate the lower nature and to put our lives under the power of the higher, is to—

Move upwards, working out the beast,
And let the ape and tiger die.

We store up in our moral nature the record and result of our struggle. The story of failure or success is indelibly written there. Every man keeps his own judgement-book. At the touch of the Almighty's finger memory will at last unroll her film, and the seemingly dead past will leap into life, while deeds long since forgotten will reappear and again act themselves out before our gaze.

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We register not merely our moral progress but our moral direction. It stands expressed in unmistakable terms which he who runs may read. If we are moving up in the scale of being, then it must be seen in broader charity, in deeper sympathy, and in heightened power of self-control.

Our own conscience for ever tends to shift the lines, to lower the jumps and diminish the moral demand ; whereas the divine requirement remains sternly and unalterably the same. Let us face the divine standard to-day, and even as we gaze at its awful and unattainable sanctity and shrink abashed from the dazzling whiteness of its holiness, lo, it is seen to take human form. Its sternness melts into tenderness. Instead of repelling, it attracts ; instead of withdrawing from us, it waits for us with pitying patience and all-hopeful love. It looks at us with loving eyes ; it speaks to us in reassuring tones ; it stretches out welcoming hands and draws us upward out of self and all that is low and base into its own serene heights of holiness and love.

THE CORPORATE IDEAL IN CHURCH LIFE

STUDY I

Christ . . . the head of all things, to the church, which is His body.—EPH. i. 23.

—*Not discerning His body.*—I COR. xi. 29.

IT is important to distinguish between a church and a mere congregation. A congregation is not necessarily a mutually related assembly; but a church is. A church is an organized body of Christian believers, by whatsoever name they may be called, and wheresoever they may meet. For the most part modern city churches are in peril of becoming mere congregations. They tend more and more to become simply groups of unrelated atoms, having no structural unity or corporate entity, at least proportionate to their size. They have nuclei of organized life in their Sunday schools, their fellowship classes, their Endeavour Societies, and their Guilds, it is true. Even these, however, are suffering from want of inter-relation.

What there is of church life in these separated departments, instead of representing a federated continent of mutual interests, resembles rather

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a sort of spiritual archipelago, each little island in the group cherishing its own isolation, instead of reaching out in reciprocal relation to its fellows, and, through sharing with them in a common life, becoming available for common work.

The fundamental thought underlying the apostle's teaching is that the Christian life is a related life: first of all to Jesus Christ as Head; and then, through Him, to one another.

Paul's analogy is deeply scientific. In the human body all the limbs and functions are members one of another. The association is so close and vital that each is for the other, and all are controlled by the head. Even the unconscious and automatic actions, such as the beating of the heart, the processes of digestion and assimilation, are all controlled by the brain. It is out of this fulfilled relation of each separate organ to the brain that the concord and efficiency of the whole body spring. Now, the relation of each function to the brain is established for it; but the working relation of the functions to one another, and their power to combine in order to produce a given result, have to be acquired. Here, for example, is a little child. We will assume that everything is normal and healthy, in which case all the functions are in reciprocal relation to

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the brain. But their relation to one another is as yet so imperfectly adjusted, that the child cannot localize your voice. Indeed, it cannot localize its own mouth with anything like accuracy, but in the attempt pokes its thumb into its eye. As the years pass on, however, hand, and eye, and ear come to work together with such swift and unerring accuracy that a shorthand reporter will take two hundred and fifty words a minute, and even this incredible speed is likely to be outstripped. The various parts of the human body were thus made to act in concert. No one of them can live to itself, and no one can die to itself. They each carry corporate responsibilities. So with the Church, which is the body of Christ. Its members are not merely members of Christ, but of one another. We are in peril of over-individualism. It is the price we have to pay for our Protestantism.

But the right of private judgement and private action must be so construed and exercised as to subserve the corporate good. Christianity is a brotherhood, and for a man to claim filial relations with God while defaulting in fraternal relations with man is to cancel his claim. We have been recovered as individuals from the mass, but only that we may be organized into a corporate unity which, while it

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carries corporate privileges, makes them all turn on the performance of mutual duties, and the contribution of mutual effort, for the good of all. The Spirit-led man very speedily finds that God has a will for him that is broader than his own life, and outruns the limits of his own personality. It is a will that takes him up, not as an end merely, but as a means to large, divine, far-reaching ends, graduating him as a candidate for an all-world society, into which he is to grow incorporate, and which, when complete, will become expressive of the perfect will of God.

No single life, however broad or many-sided, could provide an adequate field for the manifestation of the divine purpose in humanity. That purpose requires myriads of personalities, diverse qualities, and innumerable occupations, in order that the length and breadth of its infinite scope may find expression. Take another great Apostolic analogy, the architectural conception, under cover of which believers are likened to living stones in a great spiritual temple that is being upreared. It is clear from this figure that no one life is for itself or stands alone. It is part of an organic whole, to the perfection of which it must contribute in order to fulfil the divine purpose and ideal. Humanity, however widespread and diversified, is being

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divinely wrought up into a structural unity, and no character can be complete in itself.

Let us unfold the figure. Here, on the one hand, is a great marble quarry. Its huge blocks lie together, it is true, but not in any organized architectural relation ; they are just as they have been flung by the titanic forces of Nature. But, here on the other hand, is Hans Von Fernach, the great architect of the fourteenth century. He is required by Matteo Visconti, the lord of Milan, to design a magnificent cathedral regardless of cost. The German sits and dreams his dream of a temple vast and splendid. To the realization of that dream, however, block after block must be cut out of the mass. Each must be individualized and shaped according to the architect's plan. To the unskilled eye the building yard is simply a wilderness of unrelated stones ; but to the eye of the artist they are all co-operant to a sublime and stately end. They have first to be isolated and individually shaped, but only that they may come together again in new and richly harmonized relation, in springing arch, in fretted dome, in carven shrine and tapering spire ; till to-day the Cathedral of Milan stands a fixed and frozen dream of beauty that is the wonder of the world.

So, too, God is building a temple, the stones of

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which are human lives. These living stones have first of all to be cut out of the mass. They have to be individually shaped and set in relation to the Master-Will. They have to be wrought into form and touched into beauty, that they may express the mind of the Divine Architect. Not, however, to stand in lonely and isolated grace, but to come together in reciprocal and symmetrical relation to all the redeemed out of every nation, and kindred, and people, and tongue. Not till the last soul has been redeemed, and built into that structure, can the Divine Will be fully expressed. It is to be realized not individually and apart, but conjointly and in association. This is the eternal purpose towards which God has been working ; it is the 'one far-off divine event to which the whole creation moves.' It is that for which Paul prays, in his sublime intercession : ' For this cause I bow my knees to the God and Father, from whom every family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you according to the riches of His glory to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith ; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend *with all saints* what is the height and depth and length and breadth, and to know the love of Christ that passeth know-

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ledge, that ye may be filled with all the fullness of God.'

It is only in conjunction with all who in every country and in every age have been true to the highest they knew and have responded to the upward call, that we shall be able to comprehend the vast dimensions of Redeeming Love. Not in isolation, but in association, can its all-embracing purpose be expressed. All the imagery in which the future life is expressed is in social terms. It is a marriage feast, whose festal board is thronged with friendly faces. It is a family, with all its happy-hearted kindred. It is a city, with its multiplied relationships, its unresting activities, and its innumerable grades of life and service. It is never conceived of by sacred writers as a host of unrelated units, each pursuing a lonely and independent career, but as a vast social organism through which the Divine Will flows and finds articulate and harmonious expression. There is thus both a personal and a corporate end to which our lives are being shaped ; and we answer the purpose of our redemption only as we find and fill our place in relation to the general scheme. Our peril, as we have said, is that of over-developing the individual at the expense of the corporate ideal, and in a church that adopts this principle there can be no such thing as *esprit*

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de corps. Only as every member of Christ's Church helps to end this state of things, and stands in to the fulfilment of mutual relations, can the Church be made the effective instrument of the kingdom of God.

The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper was instituted, and is pre-eminently adapted, to promote this corporate consciousness of the Christian Church. It is not so much a means of private and personal blessing—excepting, of course, as this is inseparable from the common good. The private and personal reinforcement will come, but it must come unsought. It can be found only as it is not looked for—realized only as it is not regarded. In as far as we narrow our thought in and down upon our own personal needs in this ordinance, shall we miss its true inwardness. By concentrating on ourselves we shall lose the sense of corporate relation, upon which the efficacy of the Sacrament turns, and find ourselves at the close, like Gideon's fleece, dry and unrefreshed, when all around us the dew of heavenly grace has been richly distilled. It is an ordinance in which self is to be forgotten in the thought and pursuit of the general good. There are times, of course, when our private needs must be stated out, and take precedence; times, indeed, when they work themselves up into such a fierce

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and uncontrollable agony that they clamour to be met. But the Communion service is neither the time nor place for their expression. Here they must be rather repressed and ignored.

We are required at such times to suspend our personal petitions, and concern ourselves with the needs of the whole. This it was upon which Paul was insisting, in his letter to the Corinthians, when dealing with the question of the Lord's Supper. They had been regarding what should have been a communion, that is, a common meal, as an opportunity for individual feasting. And because they did not 'discern the body,' that is, because they did not grasp the fact that they stood in corporate relation, they were missing out the entire significance of the institution. Through making that which was intended to be a collective into an individual meal, they lost the spiritual nourishment of which it was intended to be the medium, and 'for this cause,' says Paul, 'many among you are weak and sickly, and not a few sleep.' The 'body' in this passage is the Church, not the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ, neither His glorified body.

Can we not thus put our finger on the cause of much spiritual weakness and inefficiency among us to-day? Have we not individualized too excessively? Even in our partaking of the Communion

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at the table of the Lord, have we not been losing sight of this great law of relationship, and has not each one thought of himself alone? Have we not been even encouraged by the very method of its administration to grasp the fact of our own private and personal relation to God in Christ, till we have forgotten the presence of each other, and felt ourselves alone with our Lord? Think of the familiar formula with which for centuries the sacred emblems have been handed to communicants in this memorial rite: 'The Body of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was given for *thee*, preserve *thy* body and soul unto everlasting life. Take and eat this in remembrance that Christ died for *thee*, and feed on Him in *thy* heart by faith with thanksgiving.' This personal aspect of the Sacrament is vital, yet it must not hide the wider meaning. Nothing could be more fatal to effective participation in this memorial supper than to fail in 'discerning the body.' Not only would the Church as a whole be rendered less effective as the instrument of the kingdom of God, but its individual members would also be impaired.

The Lord's Supper furnishes a fine school for this subordination of the personal to the general good, for does it not commemorate the sublimest act of self-effacement that the world has ever

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seen? In the face of that stupendous sacrifice, how can we dare to selfishly obtrude our private wants and woes? Here we are to lose ourselves in the Church, which is Christ's body, and thus become truly vicarious by filling up what is left behind of the sufferings of Christ. In this ordinance Christ looks to have again 'a body prepared for Him' which He can fill and flood with divine meaning and expression. Christ's earthly body was the perfect instrument of its informing soul. It expressed, as far as human flesh and blood could do, the thought of the Eternal Mind—the feeling of the Eternal Heart. So to-day, He looks to His Church to provide Him with a mode of self-manifestation, a mode of again becoming flesh and dwelling among men. The Church, as His body, should be so co-ordinated to His mind as to articulate His saving will for the world. Through the Church He seeks to translate His thought and feeling into corporeal terms, so that the Incarnation, instead of being merely a temporary manifestation of the eternal thought and purpose of God, in the individual life of Christ, may become a continuous manifestation in the corporate life of His Church. Now, surely here, if anywhere, when the Church surrounds the table of her Lord, when in lowly reverence and self-surrender she

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renews her vows of allegiance, the mind of the Master might well be expected to make itself known, to impart its impulses and issue its commands. Here, of all places, He might be expected most fully to unbosom Himself to those who have pledged their lives to Him and made His cause their own—leading thought to higher heights, and feeling to finer issues, and conduct to broader fields of service, and to diviner because humarer ends. Let this but be, and then not only

From eye to eye, thro' all their order, will flash
A momentary likeness to the King.

but there will flash through the mind and heart of the Church the thought and feeling which burn in the mind and heart of her Lord.

Christ's words to His disciples in the upper room on the Passover night were, at the time of their utterance, both a rebuke and a challenge; and He still utters them to His Church to-day: 'I have many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now.' He holds the solution of all the great social and moral problems with which His Church is confronted; but before He can take the Church into His confidence and make her the sharer of His secret, she must realize her solidarity, and come to her corporate unity and consciousness.

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Even in the very institution of His Supper, it will be remembered He was held back by the presence of one who was not in unison. It is often forgotten that until Judas retired from the room and hurried out into the night to work his deed of shame, the inauguration was delayed. He was to be no participant in that final act by which the Saviour bound His faithful followers to Himself by such strong and tender ties. Nor could the Saviour have poured out His heart as recorded in the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth chapters of John, excepting in an atmosphere of perfect sympathy, and in a circle where all were friends. And so to-day there must be the elimination of the Judas element, which makes for disunion and distrust, from both the individual and the corporate life; then, as with one accord and with mutual confidence and affection we gather round our unseen but ever present Lord, He will whisper to us His secret, and put into our hands the key of the situation, making His Church what He designed her to be—the effective instrument of His will.

For this have we been created and called, for this redeemed and related, in the wondrous fellowship of the saints, that in us the divine will may become organized, cerebrating in our brains, beating

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in our hearts, shining through our eyes, speaking through our lips, flowing through our deeds, and running out like a network of moral nerves through all the ramifications of our multiplied relations, co-ordinating and subordinating them to the heart and mind of Christ, that the world may see in the Church some reflex of her Lord.

This memorial rite, by fixing the thought on the sacrificial death of Christ, is eminently fitted to conquer the disposition to over-individualism on the part of His followers. Individualism may be only another name for selfishness. While it is true that we must be saved as individuals, it is only that we may thereupon be set in mutual and reciprocal relation, through Him who is our Saviour and Head, to the whole body of redeemed humanity. It is this 'body of saints,' past, present, and future, visible and invisible, that the Lord's Supper brings into view. Not merely the little group which happens at the time to be partaking of the emblem should be present to the mind, but the broad, universal Church of God, consisting of all the pure and noble of every country and of every age.

It is this vast, far-reaching solidarity, over-passing all limits of rank and race, of colour and creed, that should be conceived—embracing all men and minds, and unifying them all in the name of

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Him who through the blood of His Cross hath reconciled all things to Himself, whether they be things in heaven or in earth.

This unity is sought to be expressed in the common loaf, and in the common cup, the significance of which is threatened, if not entirely lost, in the use of the individual glass. As long, however, as we do not miss the essential idea for which the joint participation stands, it matters little as to mode. The celebration must be regarded as a corporate act. It is an affirmation of self-surrender to Him, for whom sacrifice was the law of life.

What a satire, therefore, it becomes when the selfishness, which has been separately renounced by the individuals who together compose the Church, is found to emerge again as a composite thing in the corporate body into which they have been organized! It is this corporate selfishness which, having displaced the personal selfishness, is now standing in the way of the Church's realizing the divine ideal.

The Church as a church is called to sacrifice. The pathway to the larger union of Christendom lies straight through a Calvary on which the various sects into which the Church is divided will have to lay down their narrow and sectarian aims, in favour of those vast cosmic ends for which Christ died and

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rose, and which He ever lives to pursue. The history of sects is for the most part the history of over-emphasis, exaggerated self-importance, and accentuated half-truths. Had the Church but been loyal to the law of her own development and trusted the free movement of the Spirit of Life that everywhere makes for variety in unity, she would have roofed in these variations in type, instead of turning them out of doors.

Because she has failed in this regard, it has come to pass that great and divine movements which were designed to subserve the universal Church by preserving the proportion of faith, have too often been exploited in the interests of a class. Had the Church but cultivated a broader outlook and encouraged a wider synthesis, she would often have been spared the weakness and waste as well as the shame and blame of dissipated force. Not only so, but godly men, instead of being driven into revolt, would have been recognized and hailed as invaluable contributors to a more complete and harmonious interpretation of the polity of the New Kingdom, and to a fuller explication of the truths for which it stands.

STUDY II

Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.
—EPH. iv. 3.

THE fault of division, however, has not always been on the side of the Church. Instead of there being a fine subordination of the individual to the general, of the local to the universal, there has been too often a self-assertiveness which, in proportion to its volubility and aggressiveness, has attracted to itself the uninstructed and unbalanced. Thus breakaways from the Church have occurred which have become a law unto themselves and have set up ecclesiastical housekeeping on their own. This is a subtle form of selfishness and spiritual pride which must be renounced before the Church can come to her universal kingdom and display her maximum power. But wherever the initial fault may have been, whether in the intolerance of the Church in not allowing for varieties of type within her borders, or in the variants themselves, through a defective sense of proportion and perspective, taking a part for the whole, the one clear and

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unmistakable call to-day is to unification. Every time the various sections of the Christian Church separately surround the Table of the Lord they solemnly engage in a great declaratory act. They affirm the unity of Christ's Body, which is His Church, and they pledge themselves to Him as its Head. That is to say, they bear witness to a truth in worship which, as long as they remain apart, they contradict in work; they affirm in creed what in conduct they deny. If the Church is to vindicate her claim to sincerity, she must come together. She must make every effort, and even sacrifice, to realize 'the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.'

The word 'bond' in this connexion is finely suggestive. In the original it stands for the ligaments or sinews by which the joints of the human body are knitted together. Now, a bodily ligament is a piece of vital tissue. It is a bond which life itself creates and sustains. It is not something superimposed upon the living organism from outside and detachable from it without damage to its parts. It is life's own product and provision, woven from within for the very purpose of safeguarding its functions and securing the effective working of all its parts towards the ends for which the organism exists. Any rupture or strain of the ligamentary tissues of the body,

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unless repaired or relieved, will induce a permanent weakness of the parts. And so with the ties that bind together the different members or Body of Christ. They are neither outward nor artificial, but inward and vital. So much so, that either to rupture them by violence or to weaken them by neglect is to imperil the organism which they assist to unify, and thus to threaten its life. If we are in Christ, we are sharers in a common life which holds us all in its vital grasp, and ever seeks to organize us into a corporate unity. Do not let us, by whatever name we may be called, resist and grieve that Spirit who is everywhere and always making for the healing of division and the fulfilment of the Saviour's prayer : ' That they all may be one, as Thou, Father, art in Me and I in Thee, that they may be one in Us, that the world may believe that Thou didst send Me.'

This, then, is to be the supreme and unanswerable apologetic for the Christian Faith : a united Christendom, an undivided Church ; one Body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all, and through all, and in you all.

Clearly, then, until the Christian Church consents to submerge the accidentals which divide her in the deep, full tide of the essentials that make her

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one, she is withholding from the world the most convincing demonstration that Christ was the sent of God.

The 'Bond' that binds together the Church of God may thus be very rightly designated the 'Bond of peace.' But just as in the physical body, dislocation does take place, to the straining and damage of the parts, involving the whole system in distress, so in the body ecclesiastic there have been dislocations and ruptures which have plunged the Church into misery, and sadly reduced her efficiency as a working force. You cannot have dislocation without discomfort, and you cannot have discomfort without diminished utility. We are not arguing for uniformity. In the human body, which serves Paul for an illustration of the Church, there is endless diversity of form and function, but all unified and controlled by the co-ordinating brain.

The science of embryology reveals that this partition of the body into its different organs and functions begins at a very early stage in its life-history. In the process of development one part of the embryo evolves into an eye, another into an ear, and another into a hand; and nothing could be more diverse in structure and function than these different powers, just as nothing could

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be more beautiful than their perfect correlation. They work together with such delightful reciprocity, with such mutual sympathy and understanding, as to present the very highest expression of corporate unity. And not only do eye, and ear, and hand differ from one another, but eye differs from eye, ear from ear, and hand from hand, in the same body. So that absolutely there are no duplicates. There are no two eyes in any one head that see exactly alike. And yet, in spite of this diversity, where will you find such unity, such perfectly adjusted and sympathetic relation? From all of which I desire to show that there is no need in the Church for uniformity in order to unity. On the contrary, there is not only plenty of room, but absolute need, for variation in form, structure, and function in the Church, which is the Body of Christ—if she is to fulfil her manifold relations and stand in the world of men as the organized will of God—the working plant, or if you will the standing army, whose business is the annexation and federation of all the kingdoms of man in a world-wide kingdom of God.

Now, as we have said, the differentiation of function in the human body takes place very early in the history of the embryo, and long before there can be any possible co-ordination of the

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powers ; and if the Church is to follow this analogy, while there may be abundance of hope in the ecclesiastical outlook, there is a call to let patience have her perfect work. For example, in the case of a normal child, of a few weeks old, there are all the functions of body and brain. There is the seeing eye, the hearing ear, the tasting tongue, and the tiny hands and feet. But while these are all present, and in the right position, proportion, and relation, the mutual relation is rather latent than patent, for these powers have not yet '*found themselves*,' so to speak. They have not yet discovered their corporate unity so as to work together for a common end. Indeed, to develop this *fine* communion to its highest proficiency will, under the most favourable conditions, be a matter of years of interaction between body and brain. Even then, in the most fully developed and harmonious natures, there will always be some functions that remain imperfectly unfolded, while others never seem to come into the circle of fellowship at all, but remain outside, to become a possible point of inflammation and menace to the whole.

If the history of the Body ecclesiastic is to follow this order, then the differentiation of function which expresses itself in the various branches of the Christian Church must be interpreted as divinely

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purposed and planned, but only, as in the case of the individual body, that this diversion of function and allocation of field may be succeeded by their ultimate co-ordination in an organic and harmonized unity. And, of course, the more highly organized the spiritual body-corporate becomes, the longer will the work of co-ordination be delayed. Now it is vain to profess belief in the corporate ideal, and to be for ever affirming our faith in the unity of the Church, without working towards its visible realization. How can we justify our attitude of aloofness and suspicion, our policy of push and self-assertion, our wasteful over-lapping, with its expressed or implied discredit of the sister churches' claims ? What a spectacle must Christendom present to the onlooker—with its rival camps, its clashing interests, its divided aims ! Forgetting the far-reaching and imperial ends for which she has been organized, in the pursuit of narrow, exclusive, and sectarian ends of her own, she has either lost or never caught the vision of the ideal, she has been taking a part for the whole.

Even assuming our analogy to be sound, and that each great division of the Christian Church has been divinely created and ordained to bear witness to some particular aspect of the Truth, it must at the same time be in possession of the whole. It may

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feel itself called to specialize in some particular direction, just as a medical man may be called to specialize in some particular department of his profession. But a doctor must become master of the human constitution as a whole before he can venture to particularize. Indeed, any specialist will tell you that his success in any specialization has been determined by the breadth and accuracy of his knowledge of the human body as a whole. That is to say, every specialist, whether of eye, ear, or throat, would be capable of diagnosing and prescribing for any of the countless ailments of the human body, for the simple reason that he has had to come up to his special forte through the common gateway of general practice. So with the different Churches, their differences are simply specializations which have been either developed by thought from within, or necessitated by the exigency of adaptation from without. Special circumstances call for the assertion of certain teaching and the insistence of certain practice, all of which, however, must be done so as to regard the proportion of faith, that the due perspective of doctrine shall not be lost. If we are to keep the unity of the Spirit, we must as Churches multiply points of fraternal contact. The frequent and familiar intercourse of mental and moral

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affinities provides one of the best checks to the perils of over-individualism. We are all in danger of lopsidedness. We require to exchange and compare opinions and experiences. This is true in every department of life. Men with common aims find it necessary to confer, that they may take corporate action to secure common ends. The personal equation can be measured and dealt with only by comparison, and fellowship with kindred souls is the best cure for 'cranks.' If we could but revive the Church idea in this corporate sense, and by the fulfilment of mutual relations bring about a more vigorous constitutional life, many of our private and personal weaknesses would disappear, through our sharing in a strength that can come to us only through association with the organized body of which we are the members.

Christianity is distinctly social. The spiritual life is a related life, and cannot be sustained in isolation. We have seen that we are set in relation not only to Jesus Christ as our Head, but through Him to one another. It is in the fulfilment of fraternal relations that the grace of sympathy can alone be touched to its finest issues. This will at once be seen from analogy. In the case of the human body it is a well-ascertained fact that all the limbs and functions run up and find their

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keyboard in the brain. The localization of function has been established beyond dispute. The relation of every limb or organ to any of its fellows is not, however, direct, but mediate. The connexion, for example, between the right hand and the left is not straight across from one to the other, but through the brain, and the falling out of either with head quarters means the falling out with its fellow. In the case of perfectly established and harmonious relations between the head and all the members there is perfect unanimity and reciprocity between the members themselves. It is the guarantee of mutual help and sympathy. For example, let a little grit enter the eye, and at once the hand flies up to minister to the inflamed organ. Let a man slip in the street and sprain his foot, and the other foot will take double duty all the way home. But all this fine fellowship springs out of perfectly sustained relations with the head. And so when the hearts of men are right with God, when we are in harmonious relation with Jesus Christ our Spiritual Head, we are in kindly love and fellowship with one another. Then if one does happen to slip and fall into temptation, the others do not draw themselves off in proud and unsympathetic isolation, but run in with swift and beautiful sympathy to his help and restoration, considering themselves

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lest they also be tempted. Again, if one is advantaged in any way, the others are not jealous and resentful at his promotion and success, but rejoice in his joy.

It is possible that these words may come under the eye of some who have fallen out of church fellowship, and are struggling to maintain a religious life alone. This is clear dereliction of duty. Christianity is a brotherhood ; and for a man to claim sonship with God and at the same time repudiate brotherhood with man is to invalidate his claim. This is an all-sufficient explanation of spiritual weakness and decline. We have been recovered as individuals from the mass, but only that we may be organized into a corporate unity, which, while it carries corporate privileges, makes them all turn on the performance of personal duties and the contribution of personal effort for the good of the whole. The hand of the labouring man toils for the food in which his whole body shares, and not his hand alone. That is its contribution to the common store which is distributed for the common good. What is true of the hand is true of every bodily function. Each has its own contribution to make to the general good, and its own participation will be regulated in proportion to the loyalty with which its obligations are discharged.

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Were any power to go out on strike because of having thus to contribute to the good of the community, such disloyalty would straightway react on the power itself. Underfunctioning of any power results in the withdrawal from it of nourishment, for even here the principle holds good that ' he that will not work, neither shall he eat.' ' Now we being many are one body in Christ, and every one members of one another,' says the Apostle. Let us therefore stand in to the fulfilment of our mutual and corporate relations in loving fellowship, lest perchance we fall out of our relation to Christ, by grieving that Spirit who is everywhere and always making for the healing of division and the fulfilment of the Saviour's prayer, ' that they all may be one.' Towards the larger union of Christendom we may each contribute, by multiplying points of friendly contact between the various Churches. The more we know of one another, the deeper will become our mutual affection and esteem, till ultimately the things that divide us will be submerged in the deep, full tide of the Love that makes us one.

Only through the allied forces of the Christian Church can the battle be won for the supremacy of Jesus Christ and the realization of His imperial ideals.

In any great war, when different nationalities

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form an alliance, they mutually agree to sink all distinctions of political creed and all differences as to Governmental ideals, that they may present a united front against a common danger, or crush a common foe. The allied armies of the British and Prussians at Waterloo showed the value of combined force and concerted attack in breaking the neck of Napoleon's power, and thus delivering Europe from the despotism of his unscrupulous ambition. 'For Waterloo,' said Wellington to Croker, 'did more than any other battle I know of towards the true object of all battles—the peace of the world.'

Let the various sections of the Christian Church forget their differences and come together in a Holy League,—that as one great unity they may battle for the peace of the world, till they reach the glorious end, which is but the beginning of a new and diviner age.

SETTLED BY ARBITRATION

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Let the peace of Christ rule (margin ' arbitrate ') in your hearts.
—COL. iii. 15.

THE Colossians, to whom this letter was written, were exposed to certain perils, against which this communication was designed to put them on guard. They were, as yet, perils of a mental rather than of a moral order—perils of doctrine rather than of practice. We say, 'as yet,' because the relation between thought and conduct, between doctrine and practice, is so close and logical that it becomes merely a question of time as to when creed shall emerge into character, and belief translate itself into life. The danger in the case of this Church was twofold. First that of a reversion to a Judaistic type of religious life, fettered by all kinds of ceremonial limitation and prescription; and secondly, that of a certain theosophical tendency which threatened to displace Christ by substituting disembodied spirits or angelic agency as a medium of communication between man and the unseen order. Like the modern theosophical cult with

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which we are more or less familiar, this, too, had come from India ; and, mingling with the Christian faith, was threatening to neutralize its central truths. Whatever may have been the exact form of this ancient error, we gather from the Apostle's method of its treatment that it constituted a serious menace to the supremacy of Christ in the system of Colossian thought. Hence the line of argument as to the pre-eminence of Christ's person and work, in which His supremacy is declared to be absolute and unshared.

The more closely this letter is studied, the more clearly will it be seen to supply a powerful corrective to much in our present-day thought, which in many of its aspects appears to be merely a recrudescence of those ancient heresies against which the Apostle wrote. The two greatest letters of the Captivity—that to the Ephesians and this to the Colossians—constitute a powerful antidote to the bane of an unwarrantable intrusion into the spirit-realm by other than the divinely appointed Mediator—‘ The Man Christ Jesus.’ In this particular verse the Apostle is seeking to liberate life from legislation imposed upon it from without, and to put it under the rule of a personal Christ controlling it from within. Thus to emancipate men from the yoke of petty laws and ordinances,

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and place them under the reign of great principles, is to put and keep the soul in perfect poise. It centralizes the seat of government by enthroning Christ in men's hearts, so that, Lord of their lives,

He draws their petty princedoms under Him,
Their King and Head; and makes a realm and reigns.

This shifts the bar of judgement from without to within. It releases life from accountability to an external code, and makes it accountable only to an internal Christ—the Arbiter of all conduct, the Judge of all men. ‘For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgement unto the Son.’

Thus to install Christ as our judge, here and now, and to bring the whole of life under His surveillance, is to escape from the judgement to come. Such a soul ‘shall not come into judgement, but is passed from death unto life’—‘life’ here meaning the harmony of fulfilled relations with God. It is this harmony which is designated in our text ‘the peace of Christ.’ Now this peace must not be thought of as a possession apart from Christ Himself. It is the effect and fruit of His indwelling presence. Not merely something that He projects into the soul, but He Himself! ‘He is our Peace,’ says the same Apostle elsewhere, or, as it ought more

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emphatically to be rendered, '*Himself* is our Peace'—as, indeed, He also is our joy, our strength, our patience, our hope, and, in short, our 'all in all.'

Now, this marginal reading in which the revisers have substituted 'arbitrate' for 'rule,' is very striking. The word literally means 'umpire,' and was always employed of the person who adjudicated in the Greek games. The idea that the Apostle is seeking to convey seems to be this: the peace of Christ has to maintain the equilibrium which it has succeeded in bringing about. It has to hold the life balanced in finely-adjusted equipoise, amid all the conflicting and confounding forces that would threaten its calm.

The function of this peace is to 'arbitrate' between conflicting claims, rival interests, divided duties. It might seem at first sight as if the field of conscience were being invaded and its functions infringed by this new arbiter. As a matter of fact, however, a closer investigation reveals that the functions of these two judges belong to two different courts, and have quite different issues to decide.

Conscience has to deal mainly, if not merely, with questions of right and wrong. But the 'peace of Christ' has other and more subtle questions to decide. It has to discriminate between rights themselves, for among rights there are degrees of

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comparison, and even approved things may be either good, better, or best. Here, then, a finer faculty than that of Conscience must come into requisition. Look at it this way: Almost any man can distinguish between seed wheat and the seed of a worthless weed. Unerringly we could put the latter on the left-hand side, a thousand times out of a thousand. But if it came to differentiating between wheats themselves, of which there are numerous varieties, how different the result! Here the expert must come in, to discriminate and classify, and say which is the best for each particular climate and soil. They may be all equally good in themselves, but place and circumstance may so conspire as to render one variety useless, while another may yield a hundredfold return. So with actions. They may be equally good in themselves, but there may be something in the conditions of time or place which may render the choice of one preferable to that of the other; and here conscience has no power to decide. This is not its court. The function of conscience is a relatively simple thing when compared with this higher requirement. In a question of mere right or wrong, the normal conscience immediately and instinctively perceives the difference, and issues its behests. But in arbitrating between competing

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rights, there are delicate assessments and mutual adjustments that require the nicest discrimination to determine. Moreover, there are questions of a non-moral character—that is to say, questions neither right nor wrong in themselves, but morally neutral, and only taking a moral tint from the particular time, place, circumstance, or even persons with which they are associated. To this realm belong all those questions of expediency to which the Apostle refers in the previous chapter. 'Let no man therefore judge you in meat or in drink, or in respect of an holy day, or of the new moon, or of the Sabbath day.' And again in writing to the Corinthians, 'All things are lawful for me, but all things edify not.'

The sphere of law and the sphere of expediency must be clearly distinguished. The former is a realm where command and prohibition are enforced by outside pressure. The latter is an area in which conduct is stimulated or restrained by legislation from within and mostly with a view to the good of others. What is lawful is thus determined for us. What is expedient each individual must judge for himself. Expediency relates to the non-moral area of conduct, and often fixes limits to behaviour far more stringent than those which are set by law. Law, however, is stern, unalterable,

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and insistent in its imperative, knowing no respect of persons and no deviations, but holding on its inevitable course. Expediency, on the other hand, may mean one line of action to-day, and its total reversal to-morrow. Not that this means caprice, for all the time it is controlled by a governing motive. This motive emerges in the words, 'All things edify not.' The word 'edify' relates not to the individual, but to the community. The inexpediency which is in Paul's mind takes account solely of the 'other fellow.' That is its concern. If he did not exist, the question of expediency could not arise. Expediency regards man in his relations. It must be interpreted in the light of the succeeding verse, 'Let no man seek his own, but each his neighbour's good.' This is the governing principle that should modify all conduct—'our neighbour's good.' We are not our own; we belong to society. Our relation to it carries obligations that cannot be escaped. The 'edifice' here indicated is not that of the personal character, but of the social organism. Paul is thinking and writing in social terms. He is dealing with matters vitally affecting the social tissue. He knows, as every thoughtful man knows, that society can never be held together by merely legal bonds. Rousseau's idea of a 'social contract' at the foundation of government is a

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theory long since exploded by more careful studies of the rise and growth of states. The preservation of the social structure depends ultimately on the mutual good-will and self-sacrifice of the individuals that compose it. It is a recognized principle, even in secular states, that in return for social advantages we have to relinquish certain personal rights ; the principle being that the right of the society to exist is superior to the right of any of the individuals who compose it. Of course there are limits to the legal curtailment of personal rights, else the disadvantages of co-operation would outweigh its benefits and force men apart. But, while there are limits to the imposition of disabilities on the individual by the State, there are no limits to those which the individual may choose to impose upon himself for the benefit of his brother man. And it is here that the law of expediency finds its sphere. There have always been high-minded citizens whose concern for the corporate good has outweighed the desire for personal comfort and gain—men and women who have cheerfully forgone private advantage for the public weal. It is to this fine spirit of self-abnegation that Paul appeals, and which in the Christian community is the product of the sublimest act of self-sacrifice that the world has ever known. That community is called upon by all the laws of

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inheritance and by all the obligations of stewardship to exhibit and perpetuate the Christ-spirit which created it, and by which it is sustained. Listen to the same Apostle in another place—‘ Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.’ What ‘ mind ’? Hark! ‘ Who, when He subsisted in the form of God, did not selfishly cling to His prerogative of equality with God ’—did not hold on to His rights, that is to say, within the sphere of law ; but renounced His rights, to rectify others’ wrongs. ‘ Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a Name that is above every other name.’ What ‘ Name ’? Why, that of ‘ Saviour! ’—and there is no higher name anywhere in heaven or in earth than this. We reserve our highest honours for those who die or risk their lives for others. Instinctively we uncover and bow down to acts of heroism. The language of sacrifice is understood alike in all climes. It is a universal tongue. There are no pages of our history over which we bend with so profound and reverent a joy as those which tell of sacrifice for some great cause. But then it must be voluntary. There must be no compulsion, no pressure, but that of love.

Here, then, is the principle for which Paul pleads—the principle that will relinquish what is legally our right to redress another’s wrong. In the case of

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physical damage we would not hesitate. With uncalculating devotion men every day run all manner of risks to save their brother men. In shipwrecks, railway accidents, and mining disasters, the most heroic deeds are being constantly performed by simple ordinary men, who think nothing of personal safety in their effort to rescue human life. All that is needed is a vivid sense of peril, and the spirit of chivalry can be relied upon to do the rest ; and shall this principle disappoint us when it enters the moral realm ? Take, for example, the matter of Temperance reform. All that is needed is for thoughtful men and women to go into the silence of their own hearts and ponder over the woful ruin that follows in the train of this single vice, in order to come out with tense, purposeful lips, and with the light of a great renunciation shining in their eyes. It is to this spirit of chivalry that we would make our appeal. For the sake of the 'other fellow' will not the readers of these lines reach out a helping hand ? This is the true *esprit de corps*, which is as much higher than mere law as law is higher than the brute instinct of the savage who plays only and always for his own hand. It is the presence of this spirit in a community that constitutes its truest safeguard from corruption and decay. Law cannot save. The amount of evil

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that can exist in a society, and with which law is impotent to deal, is so appalling that unless other than restrictive elements were at work nothing could save the social organism from dissolution. In the last resort, and in the ideal state, every citizen must be 'a law unto himself.' This phrase has been often quoted as though it meant a laxer rule of conduct, whereas it meant, as Paul employed it, a self-legislation more exacting than that which any external code could impose. It is a class of legislation which depends for its enforcement entirely upon the sense of obligation resident in the individual himself. This is the ideal towards which every State should struggle—freeing itself from the necessity of law without by incorporating into itself great principles of self-sacrifice that shall rule it from within. This is a freedom that will express itself, not in a larger licence in the fields of time, but in a cheerful curtailment of private privilege for the public good.

This, then, is the only way of peace. The fact is that deference to public opinion can never make for peace, for it is never stable. It is as capricious as the wind. The final arbiter on all such points is the indwelling peace of Christ. It is simply the application to the individual life of the universal principle of co-ordination, which is shown by the

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Apostle to be at work in all creation. Listen to his words : ‘ Giving thanks unto the Father, who hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light ; who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son ; in whom we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins. Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature. For by Him were all things created that are in heaven and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers. All things were created by Him and for Him, and He is before all things, and by Him all things consist.’ Look at the force of this word ‘ consist ’ ; it implies to ‘ stand together ’ in Him. That is, Christ is the vital centre from which all things created emerge, and to which they all converge and find their unity. But listen as the argument proceeds : ‘ For it pleased the Father that in Him should all fullness dwell ; and having made peace through the blood of His Cross, by Him to reconcile all things unto Himself. By Him, I say, whether they be things in earth or things in heaven.’ Now, such a ministry of reconciliation as is here ascribed to Christ, covering as it does both earth and heaven, points to vast cosmic discords which are to be

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harmonized by His Cross. Here is a far-reaching and co-ordinating principle running out into all worlds, and unifying all beings, human and angelic, in Christ. Here is a Reconciler who thinks in millenniums, and whose recovering reach embraces the highest hierarchies of heaven as well as the most degraded savages of earth with natures close akin to brutes.

Saving them to the uttermost,
Till they can sin no more.

Lest, however, we should lose ourselves in these immensities, we require to be reminded that this broad and all-inclusive universalism is simply the extension and multiplication of individual reconciliations effected through the submission of personal wills. The Apostle shows us this principle at work both at the cosmic and the personal end. But it is the self-same principle that is everywhere making for peace, whether it deals with a billion or with one. Suppose I hold in my hand a cup containing water, which I violently agitate, and that while I am so engaged there takes place in the ocean yonder a submarine eruption, throwing the sea into a tumult of wrath. The self-same law that will make for subsidence in the ocean and reduce it to calm will be at work in the tiny teacup, and to the

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self-same end. And so the same great principle that is making for peace among thrones and dominions and cosmic relations that outreach the stars, is working in the breast of the least and lowest disciple of our Lord, for with Him there is neither great nor small. We are all the children of His heart and His home—all alike heirs of the peace which He died to purchase and lives to bestow.

CHILDREN BUT NOT HEIRS



CHILDREN BUT NOT HEIRS

Think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our Father.—MATT. iii. 9.

THE words of the text are part of a warning address delivered by John the Baptist to the Sadducees and Pharisees who came to hear him. They were a challenge to the descendants of Abraham to be worthy of their great ancestor. The stern and uncompromising preacher of the wilderness knew the story of Israel's sublime past. He was familiar with the great names and great deeds which had thrust her into the front rank of nations, and given lustre to her name. The fact that the great names of the past could not rouse his generation to nobler effort showed that the nation was in advanced decay. They had been living on their moral capital instead of their moral interest, with the result that they were faced with moral bankruptcy. It is always easier to quote great names than add to the list of them; easier to recite history than to make it. The stored products of the past were being squandered, and

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it was this which roused the indignation of the Baptist and made it burn at white heat. These Pharisees and Scribes were claiming Abrahamic descent without displaying Abrahamic qualities. Even assuming their unbroken line of descent, those qualities which made him the father of the faithful and the friend of God were not transmissible. There was no moral credit, although there might be moral advantage, in being descendants of great and good ancestors. The same law that keeps a son from bearing the iniquity of the father compels him to make his own record in righteousness. It was idle for the Jewish Church to point to its splendid past as a proof of present justification. 'Noblesse oblige' is a challenge that the past throws into the face of the present, and which the present must accept, or give the lie to the promise and potency which history puts so plentifully into its hands.

What was true for the Jews will hold for us. We too have stepped into a splendid inheritance. But a great past may become a great peril. It is this peril that the text brings into view. It is only as the past reincarnates itself in the present that there can be such a thing as history in any organic sense. To erect tablets and insert windows to the memory of men and women whom we affect to

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praise but fail to emulate, is to stand self-convicted of hypocrisy in one of its worst forms. These silent witnesses to the zeal and piety of the past become a perpetual challenge to all that is best in us, and not to respond will be to confess ourselves degenerate. We have to interpret our present duty through our past history. That history lays us under obligation. It hands on to us its uncompleted tasks with a sort of moral understanding that we will take them up and carry them to the finish. The present is thus the trustee of the past, on behalf of the future. To claim heirship while we default in stewardship is to invalidate our claim. Mere historical links will not classify us with the good and great of former times, for such classification does not come by inheritance, but by personal faith and achievement. It is undoubtedly a great thing to come of good stock, for heredity counts. But it can count to moral credit only as it is taken up by the will, wrought into character, and worked to moral ends. What we ourselves resolve and dare will determine our place in the scale of moral values, and the claim of high descent will only increase public expectation and demand. The fact is, the past, instead of putting the present in moral credit, casts it in moral debt. Instead of heightening claims, it deepens obligations.

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Our fathers have bequeathed to us in our civil and religious liberties and in our free institutions a great and solemn trust, for the discharge of which the future will call us to account. It is our duty to pass on what we have received, not only unimpaired, but enlarged and enriched by our handling. This is an obligation from which there is no honourable discharge.

This is John the Baptist's method of suggesting the distinction essential and fundamental between that which is merely formal and traditional in religion and that which is vital and experimental. The church that is fed and sustained by mere tradition is living on her inherited spiritual capital, which is a rapidly diminishing quantity. She is not drawing on the primary and perennial sources of inspiration, so that it is merely a question of time as to when she will become a spent force. There is a very fine and illuminating passage in which the Apostle Peter lights up the whole question of spiritual inheritance. Writing to the Hebrew Christians he says : ' Ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold from, your vain manner of life, received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ.' Now, obviously the 'manner of life' here spoken of is religious life, for the phrase must be construed

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through the word 'tradition,' which in this connexion has an exclusively religious signification. The fact was, that all their fathers could hand down to them were the forms and ceremonies and institutions of the ancient faith. For the faith itself they themselves must be held accountable. Lacking that, everything that had been bequeathed to them was rendered vain—'vacant forms through which the spirit breathed no more.' The finer the form that life has succeeded in building up, the more tragic becomes the absence of its vital and vitalizing force. Look at it this way: Here is a great commercial concern which has been built up by the brains and energy of its founder, a man 'who knew the seasons when to take occasion by the hand and make the bounds of commerce wider yet'; prompt, sagacious, far-sighted, quick to see and seize opportunity, and combining high probity with deep prudence. His ability stands everywhere expressed in all the branches of his highly organized industry, which, let us suppose, he ultimately leaves as a going concern to his sons. But while he may bequeath his business, he cannot bequeath his brains. He can pass on his capital, but not his capacity. But a great business, minus the ability to run it, is a 'vain' bequest. No commercial house can live on its past. The support it continues to

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receive will depend on the ability it displays to achieve. A set of feckless and brainless heirs to such estates can speedily reduce to ruin what took their sire half a century to rear. The only thing that can 'redeem' a business thus received by 'tradition' from their father, and reduced to inefficiency by lack of administrative skill, is not a 'corruptible thing as silver and gold.' You may put unlimited capital into it, but it will be thrown into a bottomless pit. Mere money cannot do it. The only remedy is the introduction of new life-blood. Great mental and moral forces created it, and these alone can redeem it and supply with those inspirations without which even a highly organized business will be rendered vain.

Now, if this principle holds good in the matter of a merely material inheritance, it becomes immeasurably accentuated when the succession is one to moral titles and estates. Our fathers have bequeathed to us a great and solemn trust, for the discharge of which the future will call us to account. If we default in this regard, our commission will be cancelled, and our displacement sure. The legal trustees of any church, perhaps, will number about a score; but the moral trustees comprise every man and woman whose life has received an upward impulse through the prayer

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and faith and effort of the generation that has passed. Upon you it devolves to keep your church up to its full working efficiency as an agency for seeking and saving that which is lost. It cannot be sustained by the dead hand of the past. The church is a living organism composed of inspired personalities, each of which is living in vital relation to the primal source of all spiritual being.

In our text the Baptist is insistent on this primary relation being set up and sustained. He brushes Abraham aside as being after all only secondary and subordinate, relationship with whom is valuable only as it leads to Him 'who is invisible,' but a positive stumbling-block if it detains and side-tracks the soul that is in quest of God. The only advantage to the Jew from his connexion with Abraham was that he was put on the highway of communication with the Eternal. But it is one thing to be put on the highway, and it is another to travel it. Hence it came to pass that the Jewish nation, with all their inherited and highway privileges, failed to arrive. They saw the publicans and sinners pass in, and were themselves left out. And what happened to them will happen to us if we base our trust on any imagined rights arising out of birth or blood. Though our fathers were as good and great as Abraham, they had no merit to spare,

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and even if they had, it could not be transferred to our account. Religion in its ultimate essence is strictly private and personal as between the human soul and God. To come in the naked essence of our own personality into the presence of the Personality Divine, to speak to Him, and to hear Him speak to us, and thus to know Him for our own, is for every one of us the first grand necessity. This is the message of the text.

But if our own conversion be the first necessity, then the conversion of others is second, and to neglect the second is to imperil the first. We have been uplifted that we may lift ; saved, that we may become saviours in our turn. Thus the Church is to reincarnate the Christ. The Church's problem in the twentieth century, as in the first, is the recovery of the individual. It is idle to talk of the Church's duty to the masses. To the Church, as to Christ, there must be no masses. The fatal error has been in lumping men into groups and seeking to deal with them *en masse*. Nothing effective or permanent was ever done with a crowd as a crowd. It is only as it is individualized that it can be organized, and it is only as it is organized that it can become effective. What is it that has given to Labour its power as a political force ? Why, that the workers have ceased to be masses—and have

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become individualized, with the result that they wield almost irresistible power.

But everything depends on the ends to which power is worked as to whether it will prove a blessing or a curse. Power misdirected means disaster, even to those who employ it. And the Church must seek to baptize this newly awakened force into the spirit of sacrifice, or it will inevitably work for doom. How is she to regenerate this power? By following the method of its generation, that is, by individualizing the personalities in whom it is gathered up, and confronting them each with the Cross—the highest expression of power, because the highest expression of sacrificial love, that the world has ever seen.

This is a work that never will be done till every redeemed personality has contributed its share. When Christ said, 'I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me,' He is to be understood as meaning not merely that He will draw every man up, but that He will also draw up all of every man. He will lift up the whole personality—physical, intellectual, and moral—sublimating and refining it, baptizing it into His own sacrificial spirit, and then sending it down to become in turn a morally magnetic force. By the working of this force through redeemed personalities shall heart

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after heart be won to Christ, till the final triumph has been achieved, and heaven and earth shall blend in the grand redemption-song : ‘ Unto Him that loved us and loosed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father, to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.’

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Seeing that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be?—2 PET. iii. 11.

WHEN Peter wrote the words of this epistle there were doubtless few, if any, of his contemporaries who would have endorsed his teaching with regard to the world's future. The science of Peter's day uttered no such forecast of physical dissolution as this chapter contains, for to the ancients the material world stood as the symbol of all that was solid, substantial, and enduring. But the science of our day has come round to Peter's view-point, and endorses his teaching. There is no more definite doctrine of modern science than that of the final liquidation of all material things. We are told that the solid earth on which we tread is doomed, that its very years even can be numbered. Thus, whatever force may be derivable from an agreement between science and revelation with regard to the world's future may be claimed on behalf of our text.

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A materialistic philosophy, accepting this forecast of dissolution, while at the same time it rejects the doctrine of immortality, finds itself face to face with a future utterly void of hope and inspiration. The logic is inevitable which leads the materialist to take up the Epicurean position, 'Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die.' 'No man,' says Canon Liddon, 'who has not a clear belief in the doctrine of a future life can have permanently a strong sense of duty.' Once men believe they are going to die like dogs, they will set to work to live like them. We cannot retain immortality as a motive after we have dismissed it as a fact. Hence it comes to pass that while the materialist, missing out of his calculations the doctrine of a future life, finds in the passing away of earth and heaven an argument for the loosening of all moral ties, and the throwing off of all restraint, the Christian Apostle, looking beyond the fact of dissolution to 'a new heaven and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness,' finds in the very passing away of material things the ground of appeal to the men of his time to cherish the loftiest ideals of character and conduct, to cultivate holiness of heart and purity of life, and thus in the only possible way to stamp the calculable values of time with an incalculable worth. Clearly, this is the truer and sounder philosophy;

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for it holds the promise, not only of the life that now is, but also of that which is to come.

But the trouble is that we are so liable to be deceived by the apparent solidity of things that it requires the stimulus almost of an earthquake-shock to break the spell of their enchantments, to adjust our moral vision, and to set things in their true relation. We lack moral perspective. Everything gets crowded into the immediate foreground. We do not perceive or even believe in the remote. We are for ever confounding the accidental with the essential, the transient with the abiding, the shell with the pearl. But at great crises of our history the scales drop from our eyes, and things begin to assume correct proportions. Even profit and loss change place in our ledgers. The things we had marked off as losses are transformed into our most solid gains. The things we had regarded as our most successful gains are turned to dust and ashes in our hands. The material world for the most part stands too near us. It holds all the gateways of the mind; it crowds all the avenues of thought; it knocks with clamorous hands at all the doors of sense. Under its influence we are growing materialized. We say, 'Where is the promise of Christ's coming? All things remain as they were since the beginning.' We have an impression

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of stability and security which has no correspondence in fact. We have come to believe only in the things that we can see and handle. Our faith in the unseen is exceedingly slender. We want something visible and tangible. We love the crumple of a bank-note and the chink of a sovereign. There is nothing that so appeals to us as 'liquid assets' and 'real estate.' As for moral values, at least in prosperous times, they are as elusive and unreal as shadows. But in the supreme and tragic moments of life, when sickness and sorrow and death are feeling round the doors of our hearts, the veil of the visible gets rent in twain, and the spiritual makes its appeal to us in voices that demand 'to be heard. There come times of rude upheaval and rending in individual and social life, when all things are shaken to their very centre, and a universal feeling of distrust and uncertainty prevails, that finds expression in countless forms, all of which, however, are only so many variants of the universal cry, 'What must I do to be saved?' Any discipline, however severe, that can thus break down men's faith in the temporal, and throw them back on the eternal, is a discipline that should be welcomed and acquiesced in rather than resented or deplored.

Peter in this passage lays hold of this universal

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law of instability, and makes it a trumpet-call to holiness of heart and sanctity of life. There are two main thoughts in the text, which we will briefly unfold. First, the fact of change : ' Seeing that all these things shall be dissolved.' This is a truth so patent and persistent that it almost seems unnecessary to affirm it. On every hand we are confronted with this element of ceaseless flux. The ever-arriving and departing days, the advancing and retreating seasons, the growth and lapse of human life, the coming and going of nations, the rise and fall of dynasties, the vicissitudes of society, the shifting attitudes of thought and feeling, the fading out of ancient institutions, habits, traditions, customs, and creeds—these, and a thousand other things that ceaselessly come and go, remind us of this law.

Nor is it merely the things we see and touch that change. We ourselves are likewise subject to this law, and concerning man himself no truer word was ever written than that which we embody in our solemn ritual for the dead : ' He fleeth also as a shadow, and never continueth in one stay.' So that even if the things by which we are surrounded remained the same, they would not be the same to us. This law is subjective as well as objective in its working, and we ourselves are sharers in the

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very process we deplore. We complain of the fickle, changeful nature of all earthly things, and we forget that we are changing too. The years have left their mark upon our very friendships. How many there are in whose interests and concerns our own lives seemed inextricably bound up, who are now estranged from us by the lapses of time ! Just a little neglect—an unanswered letter or an unreturned call—then a little distance and constraint of manner, till now there is a chasm that we have no skill, even if we had the desire, to bridge. How, too, we have changed in our tastes and desires ! The books that once delighted us, the associations that once we fostered with so jealous a care, the pleasures that thrilled us, the ideals that we nourished in our earlier years—how we have outgrown them ! We cannot understand how certain authors should have ever held us fettered to the page, or how certain pleasures should have ever awakened in us so keen a relish ; and as to our early ideals, some of us can smile, aye, and it may be weep, over the early life-plans that we formed.

But while we thus feel ourselves to be caught in the sweep of this universal principle, we none the less protest against it. There is that in every man that wearis of inconstancy, and resents the repeated betrayal of its hopes—a something that stretches out

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its hands as if to find the Almighty Constancy that we believe dwells somewhere high above all the weavings of time and change. The human heart sighs for joys that will be perennial, for relationships that will be abiding, for friendships that will neither break nor change. But so far as this life is concerned, it must sigh in vain, for the spirit-bird is doomed to flutter to and fro across the waste of waters with no rest for the sole of her foot, no earthly covert from the storm.

So much for the fact of change. Now let us look for a few moments at the moral purpose of change which our text no less clearly unfolds. 'Seeing that all things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be?' Notice how 'things' and 'persons' are placed in juxtaposition in this verse. Things, however solid, have to go, but persons remain. The indestructible entity that we call personality will survive when 'all that seems shall suffer shock.' Nothing can obliterate or submerge it. Though all things go into liquidation and vanish in the void, the ego will pass unhurt through all the fires of death and through all the processes of change and decay, to endure through all the years of God.

Now, it is this ego that constitutes the centre around which character is constructed, or to put

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it in another way, self-hood is the germ-plasm of character, and the unfolding of character is the true work of our probation. But character could not be developed under changeless conditions. If all things for ever remained as they were, what school were there for the unfolding of our powers? This life of ours has been set within the circle of ceaseless change as a step towards its highest evolution. Very much of the discontent of Christian people in every period of the Church's history may be traced to their failure to realize that all the fitful changes of this mortal life have an educational value for both mind and heart, and that it is only through the disciplinary processes which our changeful lot involves that character can ever come to perfection of symmetry and strength—and for this obvious reason, that we are thus taught, and in the only possible way, that this is not our abiding place; that we have other than merely time-relations to fulfil; that the building up of a godly character is of infinitely greater importance than the building up of an earthly fortune, and the smile of God of immeasurably higher value than the plaudits of the world.

Look at the question in another way. Suppose that there were no changes, no disappointments, no wrecked and ruined hopes, no unrealized ex-

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pectations, no shattered plans, no empty chairs, no wayside graves, no darkened hearths and homes, what then? Why, we should be for staying here, and weaving our little nest in time, and there would be no such reaching out of hands towards the great unseen. Were it not that 'here we have no continuing city,' we should not be for 'seeking one to come.' When all goes well with us, when youth is on our side, when the eye is clear, and the brain strong, the step elastic, and the brow unlined with care—

When all we meet is fair and good,
And all is good that time can bring,
And all the secret of the spring
Moves in the chambers of the blood,

this world seems good enough, and this life full and satisfying enough in which to stay. But when the tides of life begin to ebb, when that which

Drew from out the boundless deep
Turns again home,

when the eye grows dim, and the hand trembles, and the step is feeble; when disease lays its fiery finger on the pulses and makes them race to death,

when the sensuous frame
Is racked with pangs that conquer trust;
And Time a maniac scattering dust,
And Life a fury slinging flame,

then we begin to fall out with nature and with time.

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Then the abiding principle within us seeks an abiding world beyond, into which it may strike its roots and draw perpetual sustenance for the life that will not die. Now, it is because there is nothing here that can survive the shock of final doom that Peter is seeking to throw us back upon the eternal. It is because there is no anchorage here that will enable us to outride the final storm that we are encouraged to cast our anchor far within the veil. It is because the houses that we build, however solidly, must sooner or later totter into ruin and decay, that we are invited to become children in the 'house not made with hands.' It is because this world, with all its fashions and its lusts, is a passing and perishing splendour, that we are called to surrender ourselves to the 'powers of the world to come.'

The fact is that goodness is the only thing that matters, love is the only thing that lasts, character is the only thing that counts. The Apostle corrects our wrong perspective. He sets things in their true relation. He would have us remember that 'our citizenship is in heaven,' and that our destinies are linked up with the years of the Most High.

We are simply tourists passing through this world. It is not our abiding-place. In Emerson's fine phrase, 'We are encamped in nature, not domesticated,' and are consciously keyed to a higher life.

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Lest we should become rooted here and satisfied we are being perpetually disturbed. This is part of God's plan. The law of change is the moral constable forbidding us to loiter, and making us 'move on,' till we look wistfully for some place where things are stable, where the home-circle will never be ruptured, and where we and those we love

Shall sit at endless feast,
Enjoying each the other's good.

Any discipline that can thus break the spell of epicurean ease and self-content, any disturbance that can broaden our horizons, and deliver us from the tyranny of a mean and sordid present by putting an eternal future before our gaze and grasp, is a discipline and disturbance that must react with moral stimulus upon character. It is this educational force and value of change that Peter is anxious we should appreciate, and, by holding ourselves aright there, to win out of it the highest results in moral good.

In this school of change, then, we have been entered as scholars ; but in this, as in every school, our graduation depends upon ourselves. We may earn for ourselves a good degree, and be trained by the transient for the abiding, or we may fool away our opportunity, and find ourselves, when the final

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results are posted, among the 'plucked' and disappointed, and with the anything but consoling reflection that it is all through our own cursed folly and that we have none but ourselves to blame.

Whether the divine purpose will be accomplished, and these great moral ends achieved, will of course depend entirely on the mood and temper of the subject. How we hold ourselves to the discipline will determine what we shall win out of it ; and this in turn will depend on the relative values we place on things seen and unseen. If we are absorbed in the near, and have no eye to the remote ; if the present be everything, and the future nothing ; if to us this life be simply the play of molecules in certain combinations, which death will explode into other and equally evanescent forms ; if we believe personality to be an illusion that will perish with the physical organism of which it is merely the product, and that brain and consciousness will together cease to be, then clearly our attitude to, and interpretation of, sorrow will correspond with our view of life. Blot out the future state of being, with its far-reaching compensations, and we shall be hard beset for an adequate motive for holding on to so impoverished an existence as life must then become, especially when pain like liquid fire pours through

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our veins, and sorrow smites us broken-hearted to the dust.

The Apostle redeems the whole situation by setting the eternal future, with its immortal harvests, over against the sorrowful sowing of the vanishing present, teaching us how to win out of every earthly loss a more than golden gain. Once let us gain the view of life's meaning and method, and it will lift the whole round of suffering and apparently purposeless waste into those higher ranges where, in the full, clear light of the eternities, we shall see the surpassing weight of glory with which the woes of time are balanced in the life that is to be.

To Christian faith and trust alone is it given

To so forecast the years,
And find in loss a gain to match;
To reach a hand through time, and catch
The far-off interest of tears.

What we have said with regard to this passage may fall into the hands of some who in looking back over the past have but few successes to record. It has been a time of stress and strain. Things have gone against you. Investments that you thought would have placed you in a sound financial position have disappointed your expectations. Enterprises that had been fairly launched have come back bottom-up—or, worse still, have gone down at sea,

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scuttled by an unprincipled crew. Though you have endeavoured to maintain a clean record, and a conscience void of offence toward God and man, you have nothing but losses to report. You complain that, in spite of your fidelity to principle and the sacrifices you have made to honour, you seem simply to be a mark for time's missiles, so that life for you has lost its meaning and has failed of its end. Now, to any such let me say that this is all the veriest illusion when viewed in the light of the great truth that we have been unfolding. If your hearts have been beating in loving loyalty to your Lord, then all these circumstances of business, loss, and domestic anxiety have been your creatures, and not you theirs. They have been the ministers of God to you for good. You are richer to-day in moral possessions by reason of your material losses than ever before. Your growth in sympathy, in gentleness, in unworldliness, and in all the sweet and gracious charities of life has been coming to you along these lines. You have been gaining in character ; and, as we have seen, in the final audit, character is the only thing that counts. But no character ever yet came to perfection in the fields of prosperity. Perpetual sunshine would inevitably deface its beauty and arrest its growth. The dark days of autumn and the soaking rains of winter are

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not more necessary to the perfecting of the golden grain of the harvest, than are the dark days in our life-history and the rain of blinding tears to the perfecting of the soul.

So fret not, like an idle girl,
That life is dashed with flecks of sin ;
Abide, thy wealth is gathered in,
When time has sundered shell from pearl.

But it is not only the godly man that is the victim of illusion. These pages may fall under the eye of some who are pluming themselves on what they call their success. Things have prospered with you. Your investments have justified your foresight, and the things you have touched have turned into gold. You have been seeking the kingdom of man, and have thought that in some mysterious way the kingdom of God would be added. You have been forgetting the 'world that is to come,' in your eager grasp of the world that is to go. All your capital is invested in time-concerns, and all your wealth can be expressed in terms of earthly currency. Then let me say to such, you are in for a poor thing, a sorry investment, a losing venture. The world upon which you set so much store is going into liquidation of the most decided kind. Of course, it is going to be reconstructed, *but not in the interests of the original share-holders!* The 'godless lover

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of gain,' no less than 'the gainless lover of God,' is the subject of illusion. The man of wealth is in danger of supposing that he sits upon a throne. But instead of being the master of his wealth he tends to become its slave. If a man's ruling love be centred on earthly things, then in the very process by which he seeks and even seems to gain the world, the world gains him ; and it will make all the difference in character here, and in destiny hereafter, as to which of these takes place in any man's life. The world that men hold on to so tightly is a doomed world. Its death-sentence has been written in our chapter : 'The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night ; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.' Let us beware lest, in gripping it, we find the tables turned, and the world grip us and make us sharers in its doom. Let us use the world as not abusing it, for the fashion of this world passeth away. 'The world passeth away, and the lust thereof ; but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.'

MORAL CATARACT

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If our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to them that are perishing ; in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of the unbelieving.
—2 COR. iv. 3-4.

THE text forms part of a vindication, and thus presupposes a charge or a censure. It would take us too far afield to deal adequately with the occasion which called forth this letter of self-justification on the part of Paul. The Apostle had been misunderstood and misjudged by certain members of the Corinthian Church. The disciple is not above his Master, nor the servant above his Lord ; and so the darts of venomous criticism were hurled at Paul. He was the victim of envious and malicious misconstruction. His sensitive soul shrank from the shadow of suspicion, and quivered with pain under false imputation. Because, forsooth, he had chosen to change his programme with regard to an intended visit to the Corinthians, they charged him with insincerity and vacillation. When he threatened them with discipline, they sneeringly challenged him to carry it into effect,

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hinting that his words were mightier than his deeds. But worse even than this was the base insinuation that the money he had collected 'for the poor saints at Jerusalem' had not gone past his own pocket, and that, indeed, if the poor saints were not wholly a myth, they were quite a secondary matter of concern.

One only needs to put himself in Paul's place for a moment to appreciate how indignantly he would repudiate this aspersion of his honour. The throb of a great agony too deep for words beats beneath the surface of this letter. We cannot read it even at this distance without feeling the fires of indignation which flamed out against the insinuations which were levelled at his name and his fame. What it cost the Apostle to write these repudiations we may never know; but we can imagine with what a burning sense of injustice he would resent these reflections on his character and work. Nor was this so much for his own sake, as for the gospel's, 'lest the word of the Cross should be made of none effect.' It was for the sake of the work to which he was called, and the honour of the cause he represented, that he desired to stand vindicated from the wretched innuendoes of his foes.

It does not require very much skill in reading between the lines of this letter to see that even the

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great Apostle's preaching was not always followed with success. But he reinforces his drooping courage in the face of failure with the remembrance of his own conversion. If the long-suffering mercy of God waited for him, while a persecutor and injurious, then, he argues, there is no reason why he should despair of others, even though they were guilty of protracted delay. This victorious hopefulness is finely expressed in the verse with which our chapter opens : 'Therefore, seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy we faint not.' The emphatic word in this verse is 'we.' It is the editorial 'we,' and the implication is that it became the writer, whose own conversion had seemed so hopeless, never to despair of his fellow men.

At the same time, however, it was incumbent on him to ascertain the causes which were making against the success of his preaching, so that, if possible, they might be removed. Now, there were only three places where the cause could lie; either, first, in the message itself, or secondly, in the messenger, or thirdly, in its recipients. That it could not lie in the gospel message itself the Apostle is at great pains to show. He points out the progressive character of divine revelation and the advance of the gospel dispensation upon that of the Mosaic age; so that we see revelation succeeding

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revelation with gradually increasing clearness, till at last men beheld the 'light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.' That the cause of failure does not lie in the messenger, Paul is no less confident. He claims to be a plain straightforward preacher, not using words for the purpose of sophisticating his message, not diluting his doctrine to meet the clamour of the hour, nor sacrificing effectiveness to effect. But, as he declares, 'by manifestation of the truth commanding himself to every man's conscience in the sight of God.' Here a great truth is incidentally affirmed, that the uncorrupted conscience in every man instinctively uncovers and prostrates itself before the Highest, when that Highest is revealed.

But conscience is educable. It can be trained out to the most delicate moral appreciation, or it can be blunted into the dullest insensibility. It can be rendered as keenly alive to spiritual impressions as the trained eye and ear to physical light and sound, or it can be smitten deaf and dumb and blind. Conscience is God's witness set in every man's breast ; it is localized and vocalized Deity. As a consequence, wherever men have been loyal to their moral instincts, they have been found responsive to Jesus Christ. 'Every one,' said Christ, 'that is of the truth heareth My voice.' This became

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from the first the selective principle on which Christ chose His disciples—not intellectual acuteness, but moral simplicity and responsiveness. The demonstration of His divinity came not along the mental but the moral plane, and only to those who were dwelling upon that plane was the demonstration vouchsafed.

There was nothing arbitrary in this. Christ could reveal Himself only to the developed organ of moral consciousness. This is why men's estimate of Jesus has always been a key to their moral character. The men who received the message of Christ in the days of His flesh were men who had been possessed with a passion for truth and righteousness—men who had not tampered with their moral instincts. These men had qualified themselves to receive Christ ; and by the right of moral fitness which they thus expressed, they obtained the prerogative of being called the sons of God. Any man to-day who is seeking through loyalty to the truth he knows to acquire more truth, who is endeavouring, through fidelity to the light he has, to arrive at the source of light, will not be allowed to seek in vain. He is tracking unerringly the ray to its source ; and the path of a sunbeam back from the optic nerve to the sun is not more direct than the track of conscience within to the God of conscience beyond.

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Paul's preaching made its appeal directly to this organ of moral consciousness, and thus became a test of its keenness. Indeed, so confident is the Apostle that the cause of failure does not lie in himself or his message, that he definitely states where it does lie; 'If our gospel be veiled, it is veiled to them that are perishing; in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of the unbelieving.'

The veil is within then, it is subjective; the light finds no responsive nerve-ending to take up its vibrations. It has become atrophied through disloyalty and neglect. For just as the optic nerve must be fed with light to retain its functions in full-working order, so conscience must be fed with moral light if its capacity is to be developed for discriminating and assimilating truth. The gospel bears the same relation to the moral sense as light does to the physical sense; so that if men walk in darkness it is not for want of a luminous agent, but through lack of the appreciative faculty.

Moreover, it is not as though the absence of such faculty were a mere misfortune; it is shown to be a moral fault, and the issue of disloyalty to the principle by which alone all faculty can be developed or maintained. Whatever may happen in the physical world, in the moral world men are never

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born blind. The organ of moral vision is always present, and, by being properly functioned, may be raised to the highest power ; while by neglect it may be reduced to total inefficiency. But this inefficiency is not the fault of the stimulating radiance, but of the non-conducting will. The true light is said to lighten '*every man* that cometh into the world,' but our text affirms a two-fold truth—not merely the fact of universal light, but also the faculty of universal sight. These two co-exist as co-efficients to produce a given result, namely, salvation. Light is not an end, neither is sight ; but both are co-joint means to an end, which is eternal life.

Now, it is quite clear from the context that moral light may survive and outlast sight ; but at the first it always finds it, so to speak, ready to its hand. Any want of moral clearness is thus shown to be the effect of deficient vision and not of insufficient light. The trouble with the unhappy inmates of our blind asylums is not the want of light—they are bathed in it—but the want of sight. It is the same in the moral world, with the difference that here defective vision has been produced through unbelief. But in this case loss of sight is only the prelude to the loss of everything. It is the initial stage of a process whose end is eternal death.

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‘If our gospel be veiled, it is veiled in them that are perishing.’ Clearly, then, loss is gradual. Men slowly and insensibly pass under its power. That it is an unconscious process renders it all the more tragic. Like those painless and insidious maladies of the flesh which secretly invade the citadel of life, giving no outward sign of their devastation, except it may be, to render more beautiful their victim, while working his decay; so the process of moral undoing proceeds from stage to stage in lives that betray no outward symptom, but preserve the utmost decorum, till in some swift and tragic moment the inner and unsuspected evil is laid bare.

The condition of blindness of which this perishing process is the result is represented as having been induced by ‘the god of this world’—a phrase which may be taken to mean that which this world or age worships and enthrones as its highest good. We need not interpret the Apostle to mean that there is some literal Demiurge who, in return for the worship of his votaries, ruthlessly blasts their vision by blinding their eyes. Paul is simply stating the operation of a great law. The man who lives only for to-day will lose sight of to-morrow. He who shuts himself up in a mean and impoverished present, bending his vision upon that which is near,

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and never permitting it to range the purple distances which stretch away in ever-deepening perspective, will lose his sense of distance. His horizon will contract, and to all the splendid reaches of the future he will become hopelessly blind. This is scientifically true. It is a well-known fact that during the Boer war the British troops were clearly seen and picked off by the enemy, while the latter were still invisible to our men, not because they were under cover, but because they were beyond the range of British vision. The explanation offered by medical experts is that our men, who were for the most part city-dwellers, were unaccustomed to the accommodation of their vision to great distances, and that consequently the unused power had been lost. 'The god of the city,' to paraphrase the text, 'had blinded their eyes to the distances of the far-stretching plains.' As a penalty for never looking beyond the street, the range of their vision was reduced, and they perished. The moral analogue of this is found in the fact that the exclusive occupation of the mind and heart in secular pursuits renders them incapable of appreciating that which is above and beyond. Just as the eye must be frequently focused for distance if it is to retain its power and range of accommodation, so the heart must be fed on the unseen if all the

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moral faculties of which it is the centre and seat are to be retained in their efficiency. But the faculty which deals with the unseen, appropriating and translating it into the seen, and giving a present to that which the future holds in its close-shut hand, is faith.

What the telescope does for space, faith does for time. Not to believe in the telescope is not to use it, and not to use it will be to remain blind to all its revelations—blind to the belt of Saturn, the moons of Jupiter, the mysterious markings of Mars, and to all the burning splendours of ten thousand gleaming suns that wax and wane in fields that the unaided vision is powerless to pierce. What enlargement of mind and expansion of soul must follow in the wake of astronomical discovery ! One cannot conceive of an astronomer with a narrow mind. The spaciousness of the fields through which his vision sweeps, the scale of the dimensions with which he has to deal, the myriads of worlds that swim into his ken, must make for breadth and depth of mind and heart.

What the telescope does for the mind, faith does for the soul. It puts us in the widest possible relations with the eternal distances. It purges the vision by hallowing the mind and purifying the heart. This is why faith is so insisted upon in the

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Bible. It is the faculty not only of moral perception, but of moral appropriation. Not to believe is not to project the vision into the unseen, and not to so project it is to fail to function the only faculty that can vitalize the soul.

Let it be no matter of surprise that God should insist upon faith, and put His scorching brand upon unbelief. Without faith it is not only impossible to please God, it is impossible to please man. Let any business man try to live a day without faith in his fellows, and he will at once discover how he will hamper and restrict his movements. He must take his food on trust, post his letters, send his telegrams, deliver his goods, and even put his very life in trust with train or tram. Belief in one another lies at the very basis of our social structure. Without faith there could be no such thing as society, for the prime condition of its existence is mutual confidence and trust. Then again, who are the men who make a State great? Why, the men who have faith in it, who trust its future and dare great things for it. They believe in its possibilities and resources. They build great warehouses, they start great industries, they launch vast enterprises, they set up correspondence with the great markets of the world. It is to the men who believe that the horizon widens and vaster possibilities come into view. Columbus

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believed in the actuality of a Western world, and his faith, translated into appropriate action, passed into sight. Franklin believed in the existence of electricity, and tapped a reservoir of hitherto unsuspected but infinite resource. Watt and Stephenson believed in steam, and supplied the links by which it drives the machinery of the world. The man who believes in something beyond is the man who brings it to pass. O you scoffers at faith, you are building on it while you scoff. You are trusting in something which no man has ever seen, or can see. You are building on to-morrow ! In spite of yourselves you live a life of faith—faith in the settled order of Nature, faith in the ever-arriving and departing days, in the advancing and retreating seasons, in the ebbing and flowing tides. Destroy that faith, and all the multiplied industries of our vast civilization would be brought to a stand.

Here, then, we have the universal principle governing not merely the spiritual but the temporal concerns of men. So that not only is the gospel veiled, but science, art, and invention, and all that is best in political, social, commercial, and domestic life is hidden from unbelief, and revealed to the eye of faith. Faith everywhere leads to expansion and enrichment ; unbelief to contrac-

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tion, impoverishment, and arrest. Faith clarifies the vision, raising its power and widening its field. Unbelief dulls, dwarfs, and narrows the view. It is the penalty for disloyalty to the deepest and truest instinct. We are made to believe. Our senses conduct us a certain distance—not, however, that we may stop there, but that we may be encouraged to take the rest of our journey under the leadership of a higher guide. It is expedient for us that our senses should fall to the rear in order that faith may take up the conductorship of our life. The senses start us on our quest for truth, and hand in reports more or less accurate, but always with a hint that their message is not the final word; that there are things yet to be revealed which it is not their function to unveil—things which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, but which are waiting to report themselves to a sense more subtle and refined.

Now, to remain under the guidance of sense is to remain in perpetual pupilage. To trust only the outer sense is to stupefy the inner by never giving it play. This is to blind the soul, and render it incapable of receiving spiritual impressions. The faith-faculty must be projected into its fitting field that it may find its proper stimuli, receive its appropriate impressions, and form its

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inductions in accordance with the experience it derives.

To any to whom faith in the unseen and eternal has become difficult, let it be said that faith, like every other faculty, must be functioned or lost. You cannot let it fall out of use, and still retain it ready to your hand. But to lose faith is to lose the organ of spiritual appreciation. It is to become as dead to spiritual sights and sounds as the deaf and blind are dead to the visions and voices which daily break upon the seeing eye and hearing ear.

In the case of the latter, the trouble is in most instances purely local, and other avenues of approach to consciousness, as in the case of Helen Keller, have been opened up, along which the treasures of knowledge have been conveyed to the mind. But in spiritual blindness the trouble is deeply central and constitutional; it has its origin in the will, which is the seat and centre of all moral disorder. Hence blindness, instead of being a misfortune, is a fault. 'This is the judgement,' says Christ, 'that light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light, for their works were evil.'

The onus is thus thrown upon the individual soul of choosing whether it will walk in sunlight

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or in shade, whether it will tread the downward path of dalliance, or take duty by the hand and turn its back upon desire.

Brother man, are you in darkness to-day—darkness induced by your own disloyalty to the light? Then turn just where you stand, and immediately you will find light enough for the first step in the new direction. When you have taken that you will have more. Follow the gleam. It will be an Alpine climb; but you will have Duty for your guide, and

He that, ever following her commands,
On with toil of heart and knees and hands,
Through the long gorge to the far light has won
His path upward, and prevailed,
Shall find the toppling crags of Duty scaled
Are close upon the shining table-lands,
To which our God Himself is moon and sun.

THE SOLIDARITY OF SIN

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Did not Achan, the son of Zerah, commit a trespass in the devoted thing, and wrath fell upon all the congregation of Israel ? And that man perished not alone in his iniquity.—JOSH. xxii. 20.

THE story of Achan is the story of a sin against the social order. This is the natural evolution of evil. It begins in violation of the law within—the spirit of the ideal ; and unless arrested, it issues in transgression of the law without. In some regards the difference between these two corresponds to the difference between what is termed in English jurisprudence ‘ Common Law ’ and ‘ Statute Law.’

Common law has been defined as the unwritten law that receives its binding force from immemorial usage and universal reception. Statute law, on the other hand, as the term indicates, is the law stated out in statute or positive enactment of the legislative body. Now, Achan’s sin was not a violation of common law, even as it had grown up amongst these ancient civilizations. Pillage and plunder were the natural and invariable con-

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comitants of conquest, and the rewards of victory were the spoils of war. But here was a special enactment, a statute of self-restraint, divinely imposed, under which everything in the doomed city, excepting only Rahab and her household, who had received the spies in peace, was devoted to destruction. Clearly to violate that law was to sin in quite another than a merely personal sense. In the narrative it has been described as 'trespass.' In the Scriptures, and etymologically, 'trespass' and 'transgression' are practically interchangeable terms. They both mean stepping over the line, passing over a boundary. Of course in modern legal usage trespass has a special significance, with which we have no concern. It would give an interpretation quite too narrow to do justice to the Scriptural use of the term. Sin, then, in the sense of trespass or transgression, implies a specific law that has been broken, and definite authority that has been defied. Of course in its final analysis sin is always personal, both as to its subject and its object. Perhaps nowhere in the Sacred Writings could we find a clearer or more definite recognition of this fact than in the case under discussion. See with what persistence the personal pronoun repeats itself in Achan's confession; and even where it is not expressed,

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it is involved and implied—‘I saw,’ ‘I coveted,’ ‘I took,’ ‘I hid.’ Here is the natural history of sin. Achan saw. Of course it was impossible for him not to have seen. It was his business to see. That is what he was there for. But there are different ways of seeing. Here was a look that lingered till it kindled the flame of wrongful desire. This was the moment when the will should have come to the rescue, and resolutely turned away the vision from the forbidden thing. It was the look with intent that was wrong. Immediately the sight of the prohibited treasure begot desire for it, the moment of peril was at hand. But, though the moment of peril, it was not necessarily the moment of sin. Mere desire is not sin, until it ensnares the will. But when the will, instead of resisting, consents to unhallowed union with wrongful desire, the immediate offspring of this unholy wedlock is sin. What else can the Apostle James mean when he says, ‘Every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own desires and enticed. Then when desire hath conceived it bringeth forth sin’? Care must always be taken to distinguish between the desire and the will; for this distinction, if clearly and correctly held, will render impossible two equally false and mischievous positions. It will break

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down the self-complacency of the man who is content with good desires, although he never wills strenuously in the good direction, and it will relieve the self-condemnation of the man who is always scourging himself because of the visitation of evil desire, although his will is for ever battling it down, and bringing up fresh reserves of determination to carry on the war.

Whatever we possess of virtue or vice resides in our will. We are neither better nor worse than our intentions. The threads of conduct are morally colourless, excepting when and where our deliberate choice gives them tone and tint. Only those that are thus coloured pass into the web of character. Nothing but what we have purposed will count in the final audit. Character for good or ill will be found to stand as organized will. In the case of Achan it is to be feared that his will from the outset was at feud with the instructions issued at head quarters with regard to the spoils of war. The whole camp had heard and understood the regulation which directed that all plunder should be devoted to destruction. Military discipline in every age has required that obedience to orders shall be prompt, thorough, and unquestioning. Anything less than this would inevitably lead to demoralization, and resolve an organized body

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into a set of irresponsible and unrelated units, each fighting for his own hand. In an ideal army the soldiers are mere automata, representing the organized will of the commander. At his word they must march up to the cannon's mouth, or fling themselves upon the bayonet's point. Their own judgement must be suspended and suppressed. They must have no more thought or care for their own lives than if they were mere machines. It is not theirs to debate, but simply to obey.

On the ground, therefore, of sound military discipline, and the maintenance of mutual good-will in the army, this thing had to be dealt with. For what one might do with impunity, another might do ; and when once the desire for loot awakes, it is like a fever in the blood. All the worst passions are let loose, the lust of greed is kindled to a flame that consumes every fine feeling, discipline is at an end, and what was a finely ordered body of troops becomes a wild, irresponsible, and uncontrollable horde. This, then, is the issue when the will abdicates in favour of unhallowed desire ; and herein lies the necessity for the cultivation of the will. It is the regal faculty. But desire is an insurgent which has to be disciplined into loyalty. In the schooling of desire into submission lies the main business of life. It is in this region that mutinies

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take their rise and devastate the life. On the inner field of thought and desire all our falls are really sustained long before there is any outward capitulation to wrong. We create the mental situation in which we take sin by the hand, thus lowering our psychic force, and throwing our souls open to attack. The wrong is committed first of all, and so repeatedly, in the chambers of imagination, that the will is weakened, so that the outer surrender is often merely the formal completion of a previous and inner defeat.

We have seen that the moment of sin was the moment when the will abdicated in favour of desire. This is covetousness, as distinguished from desire. Covetousness is desire plus intent, hence its wrongfulness. Doubtless there were hundreds of Achan's comrades who both saw and desired the forbidden thing. But they did not sin, because their will remained uncorrupted, standing four-square to all the tempests of unhallowed desire. Achan saw, coveted, took, and hid. Here is a descending scale not only of morality, but of intelligence. One of the inevitable results of sin is the lowering of the intellectual faculties. In the case of Achan this is seen in the attempt at concealment. One of the delusions into which the sinner is plunged by his wrong-doing is that he can successfully cover up his

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trail, and put a distance between himself and his misdeeds. But there are three things from which a man can never escape—himself, his God, and his record. To be able to sin with impunity a man would have to reconstruct the moral universe, with his own anarchic will as its centre ; and what sort of a universe, or rather multiverse, that would be can be better imagined than described. Emerson, in summing up the character of Napoleon, shows the utter impossibility of successful sin : ‘ Napoleon did all he could to live and thrive without moral principle. It was the nature of things, the eternal law of the man and the world, that baulked and ruined him. And the result in a million experiments would be the same. Every experiment, by multitudes or by individuals, that has a sensual and selfish aim will fail.’ Emerson might have gone on to say that it is part of the moral government of God that the failure shall be made manifest before all the world, that men may see it in the purity of that light which makes all things sinful hateful to the sight. Now Achan’s day of judgement came swiftly on the heels of his wrong. The ends sought to be served by this rapid retribution were not so much personal as national. The whole incident must be read in the light of the moral education of Israel, which was still in its rudimentary stage. A

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nation cannot learn too soon the solidarity of wrong-doing and the inevitableness of discovery. Better a hundred times that Achan and all his belongings should be blotted out of the land of the living, than that the ethical evolution of Israel, and through Israel of the race, should be delayed, and tens of thousands of men, women, and children be encouraged in sin. Even supposing this thing had been passed over, the time must have come sooner or later after the settlement of the tribes, when Achan's loot must be displayed and accounted for. A wedge of gold is not a thing that a man can hold indefinitely without desiring to liquidate. And when once he was found to be in such possession, questions must be asked and answered too. Then, again, the Babylonish garment would be useless unless put to the purpose for which it was made. How could Achan display these products of the spoil without provoking inquiries? And the explanation, whether forthcoming or guessed at, must have led to disaffection, and consequent moral disintegration, among the tribes. Achan in the body corporate was like a malignant growth in the body personal. The human body has been declared by science to be a commonwealth of cells governed by laws which make for the well-being of the whole community. No cell is independent of

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another cell, and the laws are framed for the universal harmony of the whole body. So long as these laws are obeyed loyally, no cell will obtain any advantage over another. But just as anarchists are found in the ideal commonwealth, so there are anarchists among the cells of the human body. Cancer, for example, is merely an anarchist among the cells. It is a cell which suddenly sets up its judgement against the whole tribunal of the body, and clamours to be a law unto itself. It claims to grow as it chooses instead of in accordance with the social law, and the result of this mutiny is to throw into utter confusion the delicate adjustment of the whole organism. A malignant cancer tends to infect the entire system with its morbid tendency, drawing healthy, law-abiding cells and vigorous tissues into its inferno of anarchy, till medical science has but one sentence to pass upon it, and that is death. So with Achan, he was a centre of moral infection, and in the interests of the nation he had to be eliminated, lest by a swift contagion he should infect the mass.

His physical death, I think we may fairly assume, represented the sum total of his penalty. His frank confession of his wrong carried with it his moral clearance. He died a penitent soul, and in some sense vicariously ; and we have no reason to

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doubt the full absolution of his guilt. But when we have said the best we can about him, there is an irreducible minimum of horror, that might well make every wrong-doer shudder, and seek in haste to make his peace with God.

But the physical death in which Achan's sin involved his family is, after all, only a symbol of the more awful moral death in which we involve one another by the wrongs we commit. If we lived only to ourselves, if the consequences of our actions terminated within the circle of our own personality, if we ourselves and for ourselves put in the sickle and reaped the harvest we have sown, even then life were an awful trust. But the law of relation deepens this awfulness a thousand-fold. Our personalities, though distinct, are not exclusive. We are exerting an influence every day of the week. Our lives are intertwined with the lives of others, and we struggle in vain to get free. The unseen chain of influence enfolds us all, and one false step by you or me may entail another's fall. It is not sin merely as an act, but sin as a principle, that is thus reproductive. Though we may commit no overt act of wrong, we may create an atmosphere of evil. This principle is all-pervasive; it is a process of moral emanation, so that it is not what we *do* merely, but what we *are*, that counts.

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The question may be asked: 'What about the sins we have already committed, the evil influences that have already been exerted and that have mingled with the moral history of the world?' For my own sake, as well as for yours, I wish I could give some word of comfort as to that. It is difficult, however, to see how sin, even though pardoned, can ever be overtaken, and rendered as though it had not been committed. Of course it may be utilized, but it cannot be destroyed. Even God cannot undo what we have done. If we weave the web of an evil day, it can never be unwoven nor kept out of the piece. But that God may take it up and utilize it for the furtherance of His great far-off divine intent that runs through all worlds and embraces all souls, we can at least hope. God could not, in a universe of free beings, make sin impossible. But who shall say that He cannot make it subserve some high and far-reaching good!

The outlaw is always within reach of His arm, wide though the universe may be. This, which is a terror to the wrong-doer in one aspect, is in another the one consoling fact. Neither the sinner nor the sin can ever get beyond the divine arrest and control. We can conceive of nothing that would be more dreadful than a place or a possibility

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in which God had to give up all attempt at rescue and reform, for that would mean that the wrong-doer had reached a point in space, or a stage in guilt, outside the All-fatherly realm and rule. It is part of God's merciful providence that we are required to pluck the bitter fruit of our own bad planting. No disaster that could overtake the sinner could be so great as that of being able to sin with impunity. The penalty for sin sets in as a minister of recovery whose office it is to turn back the transgressor into paths of righteousness, and perhaps with a deeper love for goodness awakened in his soul than he could have ever had without having gone astray. The fact is, God loved Achán too much, and Israel too much, to allow this sin to go unpunished. And God loves you and me too much to let us wander without suffering and pain. And if only that pain and suffering lead us in penitence and tears to His feet, it will be sweeter than the sweetest earthly pleasure that ever thrilled our souls. It is this confession of our sin and hatred of it that God is yearning to hear and to see; for without it, the Cross of Christ notwithstanding, we can never become one with the moral order which we have transgressed.

Listen to the cry of Oscar Wilde: 'I have said to you that to speak the truth is a painful thing.

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To be forced to tell lies is even worse. I remember thinking as I was sitting in the dock, . . . listening to Lockwood's appalling denunciation of me, "How splendid it would be if I was saying all this about myself!" I saw then at once that what is said of a man is nothing. The point is who says it. A man's very highest moment is, I have no doubt at all, when he kneels in the dust and beats his breast and tells all the sins of his life.'

The last paragraph in the same book is : ' Society, as we have constituted it, will have no place for me, has none to offer ; but nature, whose sweet rain falls on unjust and just alike, will have clefts in the rock where I may hide, and secret valleys in whose silence I may weep undisturbed. She will hang the night with stars so that I may walk abroad in the darkness without stumbling, and send the wind over my footprints so that none may track me to my hurt ; she will cleanse me in great waters, and with bitter herbs make me whole.'

Alas, however, for Oscar Wilde and his school, Nature has no balm for such wounds. There is but One who can lay His hand upon such a troubled spirit and hush it into peace. But before even He could do it, His hand had to be pierced ; for the peace He bestows had to be purchased through blood.

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The forgiveness of sin is no such easy matter of arrangement as certain light-hearted philosophers have supposed. Its pardon and purgation have meant blood—the breaking of God's heart and the desolation of His home. The Cross gives us God's estimate of sin, and the measure of the force required to overtake and neutralize its destroying power. These words happen to be written just on the threshold of a new year. At such a point of time, rightly or wrongly, one always feels that somehow he is making a fresh start, and having another chance. The season seems graciously to put within our reach an opportunity of retrieval, so that, stripped of the impedimenta with which the past would load us up, we may step out, unencumbered and unembarrassed, to put up an entirely new record on a fresh track. There is a sense, of course, in which all this is the veriest illusion, in that, strictly speaking, there is no such thing as a new year. The literalist would tell us that there are no unrelated periods. The years reach back and forth, and answer to each other through all their busy days and quiet nights—so that no year liveth to itself, and no year dieth to itself. But at the same time there is a sense in which the hopeful view of an absolutely new and untarnished year is perfectly true. There is,

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indeed, a way in which we may make it true, and that is by believing it to be, and acting upon our belief. This will bring it to pass. It will cut us clear in one act from the clinging restraints with which past courses of conduct would tie us up and impede our progress, and it will set us free to face the future with a new and buoyant hope. We are all more or less under the tyranny of the past. The trouble with the past is that it will not consent to be past. It insists on being present as well, and the more shameful it has been, the more persistent is its refusal to get behind our back. A bad past has thus, in proportion to its success in intruding on the present, a fatal power of drugging the will, and thus reducing the working efficiency of the life. The memory of past failures makes us dubious of success, and hesitant to attempt. This very doubt divides the life against itself, and thereby halves its force. The remembrance of dishonoured pledges and violated vows discourages fresh resolve. It turns us from the sunlit heights of holiness and heaven, as being beyond our reach and range. These things are not for the like of us. We have missed our chance, and now there is nothing for us but to accept our destiny. With such lying words as these does the past seek to

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foredoom the future, so that no wonder Paul addressed himself to 'forgetting the things that are behind.'

With the new year, however, almost in spite of ourselves, good desires leap up from the ashes of our failures, hope revives, expectation awakes, courage is reinforced, the very atmosphere seems electric with helpful ministries, and the future is full of outstretched hands. There is something in the very sentiment of the season that it is well and wise to seize upon and turn to our account. In spite of a wayward past, God is saying to each of us, 'Wilt thou not from this time cry unto Me, My Father, Thou art the guide of my youth?' This is a grand and ancient message which, having originally a national bearing, places over against the solidarity of sin and wandering the solidarity of repentance and return. But, inasmuch as the nation is simply the sum of the individuals who compose it, and with whom every moral movement must take its rise, the words resolve themselves in their final analysis into a personal appeal. There is a point of time indicated—'Wilt thou not from this time?' from which the implication is clear that up to this point life has been victimized and exploited by false guides who have led it astray. This has been true of the best. Lured by false

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beacons, how often has the vessel of life missed the fairway and threatened to become the wrecker's prey! We have been duped by our own desires. We have surrendered the reins to passion, caprice, temper. We have said to these, 'Lead and we will follow'; and led they have—into such burnt and barren wastes that we have found our hell on earth begun. But, blessed be God, into this very hell we have been followed by the 'Love that will not let us go.' Step for step it has pursued us with insistent feet, never for one moment missing our track, until, overtaking us, it has bent over us with infinitely more than even a mother's tenderness—

To heal the bleeding wounds, and soothe the pain,
And bring back life and hope and strength again.

God never waits for us to take the first step. He is always first in the field, with healing for our wounds and pardon for our sin. This is the Father's privilege—to forgive. It is Love's grand prerogative—to seek and even suffer that it may save. To the Divine Father sin means misdirection, and what is needed in order to salvation is a new hand on the wheel and a new direction to the life. He who alone can arrest our moral momentum waits for the word of permission that will give Him the

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mastery of our life. He cannot only fetch us up on the down grade, but send us speeding on the up grade with the light of a new love shining in our eyes, and the fire of a new purpose burning in our breasts. It would seem almost as if we had first of all to fail before we could succeed. In our exuberance of life and our consciousness of power, we scorn the offer of tutelage, and scoff at the wisdom of the years. We insist on trying for ourselves. Youth especially resents interference, ignores advice, and declines to profit by the mistakes of others. It is not till it has been deceived a score of times, lured by false voices into desert places, and mocked by false hopes that have beckoned only to betray, that it wakes up, like the prodigal, to the folly and futility of sin. It is this futility more than anything else, this feeling that we have been fooled by sin into an impossible position, that hurts us, and is so wounding to our pride. Sin never does work out as expected. It never keeps faith. It promises so much, and performs so little. It shows us the sparkling cup, but conceals the lurking serpent till we have drained the draught. It leads us into flowery meads; and when we have taken our fill of the forbidden sweets, and fain would fling ourselves upon the fragrant sward and steep our senses in forgetfulness, it not only

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opens up a Vesuvius beneath our feet, but thrusts us into the sulphurous throat to suffer the tortures of the damned, and then, like the wily Vivien of the Idylls, makes all the forest echo with the hateful name of 'Fool !'

Now, it is just at such a moment of self-torture and disgust, when all seems lost, that the loving Father of our spirits meets us with His message of hope. It is as if He said : ' Though you have been misled and befooled, though you have defamed your manhood and defiled your womanhood, and soiled your name and fame by all ignoble use, yet cry unto Me even from the nethermost deep of your dis-honour, "My Father," and to that cry I will respond. I will take your hand in Mine, and together we will walk the upward way. My strength shall be your strength, My purity your purity, and I will make you worthy to walk for ever with Me in white.' Oh, the wonder of it ! the beauty of it ! the matchless grace and tenderness that, instead of meeting us with reproaches, silences with Fatherly kisses our very confessions of self-reproach, answers our words of penitence with welcoming words of love, and bids us weep no more. This is the God and Father that comes to us on the threshold of the new year, with the offer of a new life and a new career. Let us place our hand in His ; and, what-

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ever the past may have been, let us start anew under His guidance, who will lead us through youth and age, through life and death, till at length our pilgrim feet shall tread the streets of the city that knows no stain of sin.

COMPULSORY SERVICE



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Choose ye this day whom ye will serve.—JOSH. xxiv. 15.

THE scene described in the chapter from which our text is chosen is not only full of picturesqueness, but is charged with great moral significance. The old warrior-chief who had been the immediate successor of Moses was about to die. His had been the task of organizing the nation on a military basis. It was a system of conscription, or forced service. Every man was required to bear arms unless he belonged to the priestly caste. It was poor material to start with, rendered spiritless and fibreless by four hundred years of slavery. Since the discipline of the desert, however, it had wonderfully improved. As the captives emerged from Egypt they were a wild and undisciplined horde. They possessed no national consciousness or cohesion—no structural unity. They had to be organized into something like a corporate and mutually related life, and to be fired with something like *esprit de corps*. The task that this involved

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might well tax the faith and patience of a Moses ; and it is little wonder that his forbearance broke down. Now, however, they were at length settled in the Promised Land, and with a measure of civil order under elders and judges, in whom had been vested the administration of affairs. The land had been divided by lot among the several tribes, and this distribution of the people throughout the length and breadth of the inheritance prevented the evils of over-centralization. Not only so, it made for the proper development both of the country and the nation. At the same time, however, it heightened the peril of idolatrous contagion, through contact with the remnants of native tribes whom they had failed to dispossess. It was this peril that Joshua foresaw, and which, indeed, had already overtaken some of the tribes with disastrous results. Hence the old general convenes the heads of the nation, and rallies them in this dying charge.

The solemnity of the occasion would be heightened for them all by the place chosen for his valedictory address. Shechem was hallowed by the associations of centuries. It was there that their great forefather Abraham had built an altar to the Lord upon his entrance to the land of promise. Here, too, had his grandson Jacob followed his example after the crisis at Peniel, which changed both his nature and

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his name. Shechem lay between the mountains of Gerizim and Ebal, so that it was the place of meeting for the nation, when the blessings and the curses were uttered in the hearing of the congregation—blessings on fidelity, and curses on disloyalty, to the best they knew. The old veteran knew the advantage of atmosphere and sacred sentiment. He was a moral as well as a military strategist. Hence the choice of a spot consecrated by great names and great memories, so that all the force derivable from mental and moral association might be pressed into service, and made to lay constraining hands on the nation's spirit at this crisis in its life.

Whether Joshua broke in upon their national history and created this crisis, or whether he simply saw and seized it, we need not now discuss; but these great moments come in both individual and national life. They are moments big with meaning and charged with destiny. From them life takes an upward or downward tendency. They are moments when, with a great revealing flash, past, present, and future are laid bare, and choices are made upon which everlasting issues are found to turn. Such was the dramatic moment when the challenge of the text was uttered. The nation was suddenly fetched up with an arresting word. The

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military hero is always listened to ; if for no other reason than that he is pre-eminently a man of action—prompt, practical, sagacious, resourceful, full of initiative, and accustomed to command. Moreover, he is a student of human nature, and knows how to manage men. As a rule, the military man is not a great talker. He lets his deeds do the talking ; hence, when he does speak, he arrests attention, and commands respect.

The speaker had a brilliant record of military service and success. From the commencement of his career he had shown his courage and resourcefulness, when as a young soldier he and his comrade Caleb had spied out the land and brought back a golden report of its plenty. By sheer force of character he had risen from the ranks to be commander-in-chief. Once only in all his campaigns did he sustain defeat, and then it was through the trespass of Achan ; not through any fault in courage or in strategy. Joshua was a king by nature's right, and though he never wore a crown, yet by the splendour of his deeds he won a king's renown. There is something in human nature that instinctively pays homage to a great general. Whatever our ideas of military service and the ethic of war, and however deeply we may deprecate the appeal to arms, this fact remains. Though

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we may condemn the whole business with unsparing severity, and pronounce it to be what it undoubtedly is,—a primitive and barbarous method of settling strife, suited only to the beasts of the field—yet for all this, let a ‘ Roberts ’ or a ‘ Kitchener ’ come into our midst, and there is not a man of us, from the lowest to the highest, who will not haste to do him honour. Nor is it merely that we are dazzled by the glamour that gathers about the military hero’s name and fame, or that we fall under the spell of that strange sorcery by which men worship success, however gained, and are tricked into admiration of what they most deeply disapprove. Apart altogether from the spell of these enchantments, and in the dry light of a cold and dispassionate reason, there is something in the personality of a great commander which we cannot resist. There are the elements of self-sacrifice and self-control which he embodies, coupled with mental, and what, for want of a better word, we call magnetic power, which enables him to discipline and control armed legions in the most perilous encounters, and to snatch victory from the very jaws of death.

If this be true even to-day, when the ethics of Christianity are everywhere insisting that war should be a last resource instead of a wished-for

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means of aggression and aggrandisement, what shall be said about the days of which we have been speaking, when the only recognized right was might, and men were measured by their power to strike and their prowess in the field ?

Here, then, is the hero of a hundred fights mustering the nation that he may speak the fullness of his heart and mind. He listens to their protests of loyalty to Jehovah, but he is not deceived. Piercing beneath the surface of their audible profession, he reads the silent signs of that inward defection which was only waiting an opportunity to express itself in life. With the prescience which always marks the true statesman, and distinguishes him from the mere politician, he detected the national trend.

He possessed, not only the physical courage of the soldier, but the moral courage of the prophet, coupled with the fidelity and insight of the moral physician. He diagnosed the malignant growth which threatened to disintegrate the national life. But instead of resorting to the knife, and by a desperate surgical operation seeking to deliver them in one act from their deadly peril, he treated them constitutionally ; judging rightly that when once the system recovered tone, it might be trusted of itself to eliminate every moral toxine from the

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blood. He did not spread himself out over the broad field of human obligation, but narrowed the whole question down to a single issue—the service of God.

Right relation with the Supreme, loyalty to the divine, was in this great soldier's estimate the all-inclusive virtue, creative of all others, and sustaining all others by rooting them in the only soil that can nourish their life ; while, on the other hand, disloyalty was the one deadly and all-inclusive vice, making possible every wrong, injustice, and cruelty which man inflicts upon his brother man. Now, in these days, when we have a score of different specifics for the cure of moral disorders, which we attempt to heal in detail, branch by branch, it is refreshing to be reminded of a method which deals with the root of them all. This is ever the divine method, radical, direct, compendious, constitutional.

Joshua, like every clear-eyed man, saw that there was only one way out from moral and social trouble, and that was through getting right with God. Every other track is a dead end. Godliness is the source and fount of all true manliness ; religion is the ground of all true ethics ; and if, instead of wasting our time in vain attempts to adjust man to man, we were to set about adjusting him first

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of all to God, we should find that in effecting the greater we had achieved the less.

Godliness is the all-inclusive term, which holds capsule all the virtues, and supplies the vital force which alone can bring them to flower and fruit. The man who freely chooses the divine service is like the volunteer soldier who, having taken the military oath of allegiance to the King, thereby becomes the sworn protector of every man, woman, and child in the State. Let us, as the main product of the social organism, grow godly men, and then all the by-products in the way of good government—care for the poor, sanitary homes and factories, honest work and fair wages, candour, courtesy, sympathy, brotherly kindness, and all-round charity, will be secured. If we attend to the primaries, the secondaries will result. Look at it this way. Red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and violet are the colours revealed by the spectrum ; but they are not all of equal value. They are classified as primary and secondary. The primary are red, blue, and yellow. Possessing these we can make all the rest. All the infinite grades and shades of tint and tone are merely the result of combining these three primaries in different proportions. And so, in like manner, if we possess the three great primary virtues, Faith, Hope, and

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Love, we hold all the possibilities of a fully related and many-sided life ; for all the secondary virtues are but blends of these. Or, to put it in a still more compendious way, just as in the white ray of sunlight we have all the seven-fold glory of the rainbow, so in the white light of godliness we have all the seven-fold beauty of the perfected human life. The whole question resolves itself into one of relations.

But there is an order even in relations which must be observed, and it is this—to God first, and then through God to one another. This is the only order that can secure our human relations from being violated and ignored. Take an illustration from a great organ. The pipes are all intimately and harmoniously related. Not, however, because they stand side by side or are in physical touch with one another, or because they are shaped alike, coloured alike, or are symmetrically arranged ; but because they are in mutual relation to the keyboard and stop-system of the instrument. As a matter of fact, you may break up their orderly arrangement, paint them in different colours, and even set them in different parts of the building, yet if you keep them rightly related to the keyboard, they will mutually and musically respond. Rupture that primary relation, however, and the

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mutual relation can no longer find expression. Through the want of a co-ordinating medium, your music will be mute or maimed.

Now it is precisely the rupture of this primary relation between God and man that has taken place, and to which the Scriptures trace the breaking-up of the human family into self-centred units, or groups, each fighting for its own hand and seeking its own ends. The great aim of Redemption is the restoration of man to right relations with God. This achieved, it matters not what a man's rank or race or colour ; he may be white or black, yellow or brown ; he may live in Europe or Asia, or in the islands of the sea. These are of no concern, for, as long as he is in right relation with God, he will be in reciprocal relation with all men everywhere the whole world round. On the other hand, rupture in the primary relation will mean all-round discord and strain, so that instead of mutual love and service there will be mutual hate, suspicion, and exploitation.

Service is the note to which the whole creation has been keyed. We are born to serve. It is the law of the universe. Everything serves, whether animate or inanimate ; everything inanimate, from the molecule of matter that dances in the sunbeam, right up to the stars that muster in

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millions on the field of night ; and everything animate, from the tiny infusoria that the microscope alone can reveal, up to the first-born seraph winged for swiftest ministry. Even the highest life of all is not exempt, for ' the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister ' ; and He who was the Lord of life and glory stooped to the lowliest tasks, thus embodying His own beautiful conception of chieftainship which He had put before His disciples in the memorable words, ' He that would be greatest among you shall be servant of all.' Even of the Divine Father Christ said, ' My Father worketh hitherto,' so that the God of angels serves. Indeed, the work of creation would seem to be nothing more nor less than the creation of a divine opportunity for self-sacrificing service on the part of the Creator. So far as we can see there was no necessity for the Eternal to break up His infinite repose with the unresting ministries which His creative activities have involved—unless, indeed, it was the moral obligation of service which is so deeply laid in the very nature of things. And this we conceive to have been the case. Service seems to be that which affords life the most spacious opportunity of coming to its highest expression. The motive and measure of service give the true value of a man's life to the

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community. He has to make his choice as to whether through the service of God he will serve his fellows, and thus through sacrifice win his soul ; or whether through the service of anything less than God he will exploit his fellows, and, by concentrating on self, lose his soul. This is the issue, and it must be faced. There can be no evasion, or even delay, for in morals postponement resolves itself into decision. In this chapter the alternatives are clearly and forcibly stated ; the distinction between good and evil is sharply drawn, and the issues of life and death are unveiled. Clearly there is no neutrality possible, neither can any combination service be allowed. The question, let it be observed, is not as to whether we shall serve or not. As to that, we have no choice. Serve we must, some master. But when we choose our master we choose our work, and when we choose our work we choose our wages. We cannot sell our labour in one market, and collect our wages in another. The alternatives that were set before the Children of Israel confront us all. There are set before us life and death, blessing and cursing, the Lord of all and the gods of the nation—the gods of silver and gold, of wealth and power, of pleasure and fame ; and we must make our choice.

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A man must fix on some scheme of life, or else allow the logic of circumstance to determine for him what he has not the moral courage to determine for himself. In either case he, and he alone, is responsible for the issue. No one can escape the onus of a formal decision, or throw the blame of disaster on circumstance. In worldly affairs men are not content to be the slaves of circumstance ; they aim at being its masters. In proportion to the courage and persistence with which they yoke it up and turn it to their ends do they reap their returns. Why should this principle be suddenly reversed when it comes to a question of moral work and wage ?

To repeat, then, when we choose our master, we choose our wages ; when we resolve on the seed we shall sow, we settle the harvest we shall reap ; when we select the path we shall tread, we select the end to which it leads.

These, in the nature of things, are inseparable. The logic that links them is inevitable. Wages are involved in service, ends are folded up in beginnings, and in the tiny seed of the present the boundless harvests of the future lie cradled and concealed. Here and now we make our choice, upon which everlasting issues have been made to turn. The service of God will mean the highest freedom here

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and everlasting satisfaction hereafter. The service of Satan will mean a bondage so bitter that the memory of it, even though we be redeemed from its curse, will temper the joy of our eternal years. We are challenged to 'choose this day.'

The offer of salvation is always in the present tense. This greatly simplifies the transaction. There are no complications of what are known in the commercial world as 'options' and 'futures.' Here and now, on the spot and while we wait, this business for eternity, that will cancel our past and make our future sure, can be done. Nothing else can do it. There is no 'statute of limitations' in the moral world. The lapse of years is as powerless to wipe out our moral liabilities as it is to obliterate our personal identity. Let me urge you, then, to face round and confront your record. There it stands, marred and stained by selfishness and sin. Something has to be done with it. It must either be 'carried forward' or 'settled.' Which do you prefer? Why not this instant and for ever close the account of sin? Have done, I entreat you, with the devil and his works, and do business with God and salvation. Unforgiven sin is reproductive sin. But with God's great grace of pardon there always sets in the grace of moral recovery, working destructively against evil tendency and constructively

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towards holy character. Sin is rupture of relations. It destroys the nexus or link of connexion between the soul and God. It throws man out of correspondence with the sources of spiritual being, and this want of correspondence is only another name for spiritual death. This is a rupture that can never be healed by the mere lapse of years. Time only widens the breach of separation. It is this fact that renders the question of present salvation of such momentous concern. In most cases of delayed decision for God it is assumed that desire for salvation can be induced at will, and that ability to grasp opportunity will be an ever-present power. Never was there a more damnable pair of delusions. They both spring from forgetting the self-perpetuating power of evil habit and the momentum that the soul acquires in the downward track.

Salvation offers to-day. It is a piece of impertinent presumption to say you will close with it to-morrow. This offer is not open till to-morrow. I do not say you will not have another offer to-morrow ; but it will not be the same as that of to-day, nor with precisely the same advantages. If I make you a business offer to-day of certain shares in a rising market at a definite quotation, and you do not close, the offer is 'off.' You do not expect to come round to-morrow and purchase

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at to-day's quotation. Of course the offer may remain open, but that is for me to say, not for you.

Now, in this business of salvation, it is God's offer of life on the spot. 'Now is the acceptable time.' Any extension is His prerogative, not ours. Every day, as business men, you are called upon to decide for or against certain purchases. But when you fail to close with what turns out ultimately to have been a good offer, you do not go whimpering round the market and wanting the transaction reopened. You just grin and bear it. You had your chance and missed it. If you want to get in now, well, you must get in under less advantageous conditions. It is the same with salvation. The offer is a definite one for the moment; and while the conditions in one sense may be said never to alter on God's side, yet they do on ours. God's arm is not shortened, but our disposition to grasp it decreases. His ear does not grow heavy, but our cry becomes faint. Indeed, the law of decreasing moral sensibility with extended delay holds most rigorously in the moral world. What will it profit you, then, though the most splendid opportunity presents itself in the future, if the power or disposition to embrace it be dead? You cannot go on rejecting offer after

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offer of salvation, and then expect to come in on the same footing as those who closed with it at first. But you say, 'What about the parable of the labourers; did they not each receive a penny a day?' Yes, they did; but that was because, although some had laboured but a single hour, they had closed with the first offer of work which they had received. They were able to give as a reason for being among the unemployed, 'No man hath hired us.' Can any man who reads these words give as a reason for holding aloof from Christ and His salvation that he has never had an offer of life? Unless he can, let him beware lest his delay turn to his defeat, and close against him for ever the door of life.

But all this has not only an individual but a national bearing. 'The nation that will not serve Thee,' says the prophet, 'shall perish.' Isaiah, like Joshua, brings us face to face with the Ideal. The City of God, which the former thus personifies, is not the Jerusalem of the Jew merely, but the moral metropolis of the universe, in which all beauty and power combine, and to which all hearts and minds contribute. It is the seat and centre of culture and commerce, the converging point of mental and moral excellence. Standing thus as the realized expression of all that is best in intellect

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and heart, it becomes at once an inspiration and an indictment—an inspiration to all nations that are responsive to its upward beckoning, an indictment of those who prefer the downward way.

The teaching is that the nation that will not serve the highest, when that highest is revealed, must enter upon ruin and decay. This is the law, and it knows no relaxation. It is the supreme imperative of the moral ideal that will take no excuses, make no exceptions, and from which there is no appeal. The coming and going of nations, the rise and fall of kingdoms, are all marshalled under law. That law is the survival of the fittest, and the fittest are the morally best. Any other reading of history reduces it to a hopeless tangle. With this key the seeming confusion resolves itself into an ordered plan. There have been federations from the Tower of Babel down ; there have been world-powers held together by other than moral ties ; but these ties have been invariably dissolved, these world-powers have disappeared from the stage of history, these federations have been shattered into fragments and scattered in dust. The history of the past is little else than a succession of falling kingdoms, failing sceptres, and tottering thrones. Through every chapter the desolation marches, till the heart grows sick at the changing fortunes that

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pursue one another with all the swiftness of a bioscopic show. As the traveller walks the Forum at Rome, and gazes on the prostrate columns of the Caesars who once held the world in awe ; as he stands on the Acropolis at Athens, that holy of holies to the Greeks, and views the majestic ruins of the Parthenon ; as he wanders among the ravaged splendours of ancient Assyria—a pigmy amid the colossal pillars of Baalbec—and marvels at the brains that thought and the hands that wrought these miracles in stone ; or as he broods in Egypt over the mighty mystery of the Pyramids that lift their awful forms amid the desolation of the desert, till he dreams of the dynasties that have come and gone in the valley of the Nile,—amid all these remains of ancient civilizations, and these relics of vanished kingdoms, he cannot help inquiring as to the conditions of national permanence, and the question springs unbidden to his lips, ‘ To what purpose is this waste ! ’ The history that suggests the problem furnishes the reply : the nations that do not live to serve high moral ends are displaced. Only those who live to serve deserve to live. Judged by the material standards of wealth, military efficiency, intellectual culture, population, and breadth of territory, Egypt and Assyria, Greece and Rome should

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be here to-day; but weighed in the balance of moral worth they were found deficient and had to be displaced.

And what happened to them will happen to us unless we fulfil the moral test. We have no prescriptive rights to the position we hold. Our commission turns on conduct, it is conditioned by behaviour. We have but to ask what, as a people, we are doing, and the problem of our destiny is instantly solved. Ours is a great trust, and we believe that this trust can be best administered through the realization of the Imperial Ideal. If, as a people, we make ourselves formidable, it must be only that we may make other people free. To this task we are called of God and committed. The past looks to us to make its promise good; the future looks to us to make its freedom sure—let them not look in vain. Britain has often thrown the weight of her influence, and, when needed, the weight of her sword, into the scale of nations struggling to be free. Though it may be true that some of her conquests have been stained by cruel wrongs that cannot be excused, yet those wrongs have been nobly expiated by a magnificent record of beneficent administration in the interests of those over whom she rules. And while there are those who dispute our right

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to be in India and Egypt to-day, we believe that to evacuate either at this juncture would be to put back the clock of history, and react with moral and material disaster on both. Take the testimony of Lord Cromer : 'I make no pretension to the gift of political prophecy. I can only state my deliberate opinion, formed after many years of Egyptian experience, and in the face of a decided predisposition to favour the policy of evacuation, that at present, and for a long time to come, the results of executing such a policy would be disastrous. . . . Neither by the display of sympathy nor by good government can we forge bonds which will be other than brittle.' Sir Herbert Edwards, writing to Lord Lawrence a few years after the annexation of the Punjab, said : 'We are not liked anywhere. . . . The people hailed us as deliverers from Sikh maladministration, and we were popular so long as we were plastering wounds. But the patient is well now, and he finds the doctor a bore. There is no getting over the fact that we are not Mohammedans—that we neither eat, drink, nor intermarry with them.'

The present situation in Egypt is very similar to that which existed in the Punjab when Sir Herbert Edwards wrote these lines. The want of gratitude displayed by a nation to its alien benefactors

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is almost as old as history itself. In whatever degree ingratitude may exist, it would be unjust to blame the Egyptians for following the dictates of human nature. In any case, whatever be the moral harvest we may reap, we must continue to do our duty, and our duty has been indicated to us by the Apostle Paul. We must not be 'weary of well-doing.'

If this be so—and no statesman has ever written with a saner mind, a fuller heart, or a finer grasp of all the facts—then we contend, by all the rights and responsibilities of international ethics, we are where we ought to be, and, till our work is finished, we must stay. Britain, for her own sake, and ~~for~~ the sake of all men, cannot allow the world to drift. Grave moral responsibilities are attached both to the position and the possessions that we hold, and we can neither safely nor honourably repudiate the obligations which in the providènce of God we have incurred.

Never in English history were the bonds of empire so closely drawn. Never was the family feeling so strong. Never was the unity of the Anglo-Saxon race so visible, so audible, or so unequivocal as it is to-day. And never was that unity more conscientiously employed or more intelligently directed to definite moral ends. It is this convergence to

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moral ends upon which we must bend our powers. Let our Imperial Federation stand for the universalizing of high ideals—for the substitution of great principles in the place of petty policy and intrigue in the councils of the nations—for the outspreading of social truth and justice in the dark places of the earth, and then it will have a value and significance in history of quite transcendent scale. The supreme industry of the Empire must be, not the development of its material resources of gold or silver, of copper or wheat, of wool or wine; but the unfolding of its manhood and its mind. Not the making of money, but the making of men. To this must everything be made subordinate. First and last a nation's wealth consists not in material, but in moral elements. Rich in these, she will endure; wanting them, she must decay. There is no exception to this rule. There never has been, and there never will be. Reverence for the Supreme, devotion to duty, domestic fidelity, commercial integrity, and all-round self-control—given these, or even the struggle after them, and the nation's movement will be upward and her pathway sure.

WORSHIP AND WORK

WORSHIP AND WORK

Your reasonable service.—ROM. xii. 1.

IT is the term ‘service’ that we wish to unfold in this brief study, for it is a word of surpassing richness. In working a gold-bearing lode, miners occasionally break into what is known as a ‘pocket’—that is, a cavity in the reef containing a cluster of nuggets, often of surprising value and beauty. In a similar way, in working the reef of divine revelation one frequently comes upon a single word which, upon being broken into, yields undreamt-of wealth in the way of spiritual suggestion, and pays handsomely for all the time and patience expended in opening it up.

We have done a good deal of work in this twelfth of Romans reef, but it is full of ‘pockets’ which have not yet been rifled. If ever there was a storhouse of spiritual gold and gems this is one; and as beauty after beauty and treasure after treasure unfold themselves to the eye of the astonished seeker, he trembles with excitement and

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is swept through with emotions too deep for words.

The two dominant words in this chapter are 'sacrifice' and 'service.' On the surface they appear mutually contradictory. Perhaps the contradiction stands out most clearly in the phrase, 'a living sacrifice.' The word translated 'living' means to be full of vigour and overflowing strength; while that translated 'sacrifice' implies to be dead and laid upon an altar waiting to be consumed. Beneath the seeming contradiction, however, there is an underlying harmony in which these two ideas find their unity. The fact is that sacrifice, as here enjoined, is not an end, but a means. Just as the priest in the ancient time laid the body of the slaughtered victim on the altar to be consumed by sacred fire, so we are instructed to lay, not our dead, but our living bodies upon the altar of consecration, there to be consumed, not by literal fire, but with a divine passion; and fired with an enthusiasm for service that will count no labour too hard to endure and no cross too heavy to bear. It is to surrender, not for passive suffering, but for active work. It is the yielding of our 'members' as 'instruments of righteousness unto God.' The word 'instruments' stands for tools, weapons, or implements; and just as these are required to

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be kept sharp, and polished, and ready for use, so our faculties of mind, soul, and body are to be presented to God, not mutilated and reduced in efficiency, but in all their fine force and fullness. God requires every faculty, and has use for every ounce of force.

We are called, then, to service. It is the practical end of all Paul's preaching. It is the justification of all the mystical teaching that has gone before. The original word of which this term 'service' is the translation unites in itself the two notions of worship and work. Worship that does not issue in work is thereby discredited. This is the point of Christ's rebuke when He says, 'Ye call Me Master and Lord, but ye do not the things that I say.' Christianity is nothing if not practical. Hence the Apostle shows the high and holy consecration of the first verse in this chapter, running down and out into all the multiplied relations—domestic, social, business, political—of a man's complex and many-sided life. On the other hand, work that does not root itself in worship must wither for want of adequate soil. It is only as the sacrifice of the first verse is made, and kept complete, that all the minor moralities, amenities, and gracious charities of life can be discharged and sustained.

Both worship and work must also have a rational

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origin. It is a 'reasonable,' that is, a rational service. Any so-called worship that does not carry the whole mind and heart is a mockery. It ends in mere mechanical performance of outward ritual. This is the 'sacrifice of fools,' which is as offensive to God as it is hurtful to men.

Worship means the honouring of that which is worthy. It is literally 'worthship.' It pays homage to certain qualities, which it is thereby pledged to emulate. To admit that these qualities have a claim upon our reverence is to admit our obligation to reproduce them in life and conduct. These are the things which we acknowledge as the highest and best, and therefore to be pursued. To worship them is to own their supremacy, and therefore their right to rule. Not to yield them allegiance is to live under their perpetual rebuke, and to stand outwardly and inwardly condemned. 'We needs must love the highest when we see it.' But to love carries with it an instinctive desire to emulate; unconsciously we seek and tend to resemble that which we admire. There are thus two laws at work in the act of true worship—the law of moral obligation, and the law of moral assimilation, conforming us to the image of Him whom we enthrone and adore. If our religion is not to degenerate into a worse selfishness than

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that from which we have been delivered, we shall have to reach out helping hands to others. We are saved to serve, and our salvation is a process that will be hastened or retarded by the fidelity or disloyalty of our service. Not to do the second is to imperil the first. 'He that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin.' Worship must issue in work. Creed must express itself in deed. Principles must translate themselves into practice. Then, and then only, shall we 'have right to the tree of life, and enter in through the gates into the city.'

The worship of God, to be acceptable to Him, and accredited to the world, must issue in service to man. Service is the manward side of worship, and worship is the Godward side of service, and neither apart from the other is of worth.

We call the function in which we engage from Sunday to Sunday 'divine service.' Have we ever asked ourselves what we mean by this phrase? Does it mean—can it mean, that we poor creatures can in any sense be of service to Him who holds all worlds in His grasp, and is the fount and source of all life? What need can He have of us, who are but as dried and driven leaves before the breath of His mouth?—of us, whose days are as grass, and who flourish as the flower of the field,

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which the wind passeth over, and it is gone, so that the place thereof knows it no more ?

Listen to His challenge in the 50th Psalm and mark its splendid scorn : ' Hear, O My people, and I will speak ; O Israel, and I will testify against thee : I am God, even thy God. I will not reprove thee for thy sacrifices or thy burnt offerings, to have been continually before Me. I will take no bullock out of thy house, nor he-goats out of thy folds. For every beast of the forest is Mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. I know all the fowls of the mountains, and the wild beasts of the field are Mine. If I were hungry I would not tell thee ; for the world is Mine, and the fulness thereof.' Now, what contribution can we hope to offer to the sum of His satisfactions ? What addition to the infinitude of His self-sufficiency, seeing we are the dependents of His bounty and the debtors of His grace ?

And yet there must be some sense in which we are necessary to Him—some office that we are formed and fitted to fill. It may be true, as He says, that if He were hungry in a physical sense He would not tell us. But He *is* hungry, nevertheless, and He *is* thirsty ; and He *has told* us in unmistakable ways. There is nothing more pathetic in the whole range of language or literature than

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the tones of beseeching entreaty with which, standing over against the life of humanity, God pleads for its love. His is a hunger that the love of His children alone can satisfy—a thirst that their loyalty alone can slake. He made us for Himself, and not only we, but He, cannot rest until we meet and mingle in a common life. With His merely material creation we can understand Him to be mentally satisfied. He is represented at the close of His fifth day's work as surveying the sum of His creative acts and pronouncing them good. But in all the blaze of suns and systems that circled round His throne, in all the vast processions of animal and vegetable life that sprang into being at the breath of His mouth, there was not one of all His creatures that could claim His Fatherhood or hear Him say, ' My child.'

In the creation of man, therefore, He sought to form a creature who should be instinct with worship—a creature capable of voluntary service, whose heart might leap responsive to His own, and swell with filial love. In this sense man does meet a necessity of the divine nature. He supplies that for which even the heart of the Infinite craves. Lovers of Browning will remember the reasoning in ' Rabbi Ben Ezra.' God is the Potter, and human life the clay. It is held to the whirling

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wheel of the divine purpose, to be shaped into a vessel from which, when completed, God is represented as drinking the satisfying wine of human love.

The story of the woman of Samaria furnishes a beautiful illustration of this truth. Christ, being weary, is seated on the well of Sychar. His disciples have gone to the village to buy meat. A woman of the country comes near to draw water from the historic well around which the associations of centuries have gathered. In His thirst Christ asks for a drink. This starts the woman off on a series of wondering questions, so that she seems to forget to lower her pitcher and give Him a drink. Nor does He seem to mind—He has touched a spring in this woman's nature, long since sealed; and lo! therefrom gushes a stream at which He quenches a thirst deeper and stronger than that which parches His bodily lips. His disciples return with bread, which they spread before Him, but He has no need. He who was hungry and thirsty before they went away is now abundantly satisfied. 'Master, eat,' they say; but He replies, 'I have meat to eat that ye know not of.' Whereupon they ask, 'Hath any one given Him to eat?' Yea, He has feasted on the only food that can satisfy the heart of God. He has eaten

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and drunk of the bread and wine of unselfish human love. If in His bodily hunger and thirst Christ represented our humanity to God, then in His thirst for the love of His creatures He represents the Divinity to us—that Divinity which over-reaches and underspreads every man and woman and child.

The Incarnation thus expressed not merely God's love for man, but His need of man. Christ's coming, that is to say, not only met the requirement of our humanity; it voiced a requirement of His divinity. If man has need of God, God has no less need of man. If we are orphaned by His absence, He is bereaved by ours. Relationship must be mutual. A one-sided relation is unthinkable—it is a misuse of terms. If a key is necessary to a lock, the lock is no less necessary to the key if it is to find its correlate and fulfil its function. An unfulfilled relation thus involves a double deprivation and a two-fold loss. It follows, therefore, that if the soul of man can complete itself only as it flows towards God, so the soul of God can only be satisfied as it receives and enfolds the soul of man. For this God wishes, and woos, and waits. To this all the ministries of redemption are directed. On humanity the divine desire is set, and till it turns towards Him neither He nor it can be at

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rest. In this regard, then, we serve Him when we render Him our hearts' best love.

From what we have said it will be seen that God, no less than man, is in quest of the new wine of love, and to each it is given to quench the other's thirst. But if God so loves humanity as to identify Himself with it, then clearly to serve it is to serve Him. It is here that we reach the fullest and richest unfolding of our theme. Divine service deepens and broadens into the service of the humanity which Christ assumed, and which He died to save and lives to serve. Clearly the highest service we can render humanity is to restore it to right relations with the Divine. To this everything else is secondary and subordinate. We may do much to mitigate the sorrows of men and to multiply their joys. We can offer them food, shelter, clothing, friendship, and all the healing and helpful ministries that the ingenuity of love delights to devise; but none of these, nor all of them combined, can compensate for the deprivation which springs from unrealized sonship, or relieve the sense of isolation that smites the soul in conscious orphanage from God.

Look at it in this way. Here is a lad who has gone astray. He has wronged his father, and brought trouble on the home from which he has

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fled. He turns up at one of our homes and solicits help. Now you or I may be able to do very many things to assist a young fellow in such a case. We may provide him with bed and board, and even find him a situation, so that he may have a fresh start in life. But who cannot see that there can be no permanent peace of mind or satisfaction of heart until he gets right with the father he has wronged, the mother he has grieved, the home he has shamed? Indeed, the shortest and most effective way to moral and social rehabilitation in such a case would lie straight through the restoration of right relations with the home. That which is thus true in the sphere of our merely human relations holds with even greater force in our relations with the Divine. Whatever we may do for men in the way of social amelioration will be only palliative unless we have their harmonization with the will of God as our objective. Such methods will not only fail to serve their primary interests, but will imperil those which are merely secondary. Once we believe that every child of man is a possible child of God, we are bound to work for the realization of that possibility. It becomes a moral obligation to unite heart and hand, prayer and work, in bringing the two together, and

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making them one in a love that gives as freely as it takes.

Thus, as we have said, the service of God widens out and breaks itself up into multiplied ministries to men. We serve God in His children. No one can do us who are parents a greater service than to be kind to our children. The more weak and helpless the child that is succoured, the keener is our sense of indebtedness, the deeper is our gratitude. Let one of our lads or girls leave home for a stay in distant parts, and even if they are well and strong during their absence, and behave themselves, and find kind friends who pay them attention, we are rejoiced. But how much more so if they should fall ill, or be overtaken in a fault, and those among whom they are cast befriend them and nurse them back to health of body or of soul! In such a case our gratitude would know no bounds, and nothing would be too great to do by way of return. We take it as personal to ourselves. Those benefactors may not know us, it is true; but all the same, having done it for them they have done it for us. Indeed, that they did not do it consciously to serve us only enhances the value of the deed. Surely this is the force of the Saviour's words in the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew: 'Inasmuch as ye have done it unto

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one of the least of these, ye have done it unto Me.' This identification of Christ with the humanity He came to redeem makes Him interpret everything we do for the least and lowest of His children as a personal favour rendered to Himself, so that the truest service of God is found to be the service of man.

Christ first of all claims us for Himself and then for His service, and for this obvious reason, that all things in the way of service become possible to love. Love never calculates. It is utter in its self-surrender, absolute in its abandon. But this is because it is personal. Where you will get one man to die for a principle, you would get ten thousand who would die for a person.

It is this personal devotion through which Christ has ever sought to realize and extend His kingdom. He commenced by drawing individual men to Himself and setting up personal relations with them—getting them to fall in love, not with His policy, but with Himself, and, through their love of Him, with His purpose and plans. A slow process, you think; aye, but an obviously effective one. These first disciples were always with Him. They saw His life—a life as of the only begotten Son of God. They heard Him speak such words as never man spake; and while thus associating

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with Him, they were, all unconsciously, coming over to His side and taking up His point of view. Given this personal devotion to Him, all this was inevitable, so that presently His own lofty ideals possessed them, and through their very love of Him they found themselves adopting His plans, imbibing His spirit, and seeking the ends that He sought. Thus it ever comes to pass that the highest service springs from the deepest love, and all the countless ministries of apostleship flow out of personal devotion to Christ.

He is not so much concerned about the correctness of our creed as about the intensity of our love. A man may grow hot in the region of intellectual discussion, glowing at white heat in the defence of his faith ; but that is not where Christ puts His thermometer. Not in the head but in the heart is the temperature taken. In that memorable post-resurrection scene, in which Christ appeared upon the shores of Galilee, it will be remembered that He made Peter's love the measure of his ability to serve, the intensity of his affection determining the scope and quality of his ministry. And so to-day it is not a question of wealth or intellectual attainment, mental grasp or artistic gift, social status or political influence, but love. Weighed against love these are but

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as the small dust of the balance, and unworthy to be named. Every intellectual gift apart from love is widowed of its better half. How often we have seen, even in the sphere of our merely human relations, the omnipotence of love! How it laughs at social barriers and the 'claims of long descent'; how it scorns distinctions of rank, invading even the most privileged circles, taking captive the most brilliant gifts and binding them to its chariot-wheels as with fetters of brass. There is no despot that can compare with love when he becomes supreme. Once he enters into full possession he assumes complete control; he is an absolutist, commanding all the forces of life at all times, in all places, and to all issues.

But love has its degrees, and Christ, in the story of the alabaster box of ointment, has given us one at least of the factors which determine its temperature—the factor of forgiveness. 'He that is forgiven much, loveth much; but he that is forgiven little, loveth little.' This is the Saviour's formula. Apply this standard of measurement in the case of Peter, at the same time remembering that this incident follows close upon his reinstatement, and that he has but recently received assurance of forgiveness for his cowardly denial, and at once you have a plummet with which to

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sound the depth of his devotion to his Lord. Henceforth there will be no turn in the tide of this man's love. It will gather in fullness and force till it pours itself out in sacrificial abandon at the feet of its Saviour and Lord.

But some one may say, ' If breadth of service thus depends on depth of love, and depth of love is in turn determined by the amount of sin forgiven, how then can they deeply love and widely serve who have not widely and deeply sinned? What about lives that have kept themselves sweet and clean and wholesome? Is purity to be a disqualification for service? And do the tides of love flow only through the gateways of forgiven sin? ' This could never be; and here emerges a fine solution of the problem as to why so many of the purest souls are laid for years on beds of pain and passed through furnaces of bereavement and loss. It is not for their purging. It is rather a deepening process by which the channels of life are prepared for the inflowing tide of the divine love and the outflowing tide of the human, till they meet and mingle in multitudinous music, and then together flow to overtake the wants and sorrows of mankind.

No one can measure the ministry which such souls are permitted to fulfil. They do not only raise Bethels out of their stony griefs, but they turn

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their stony griefs into bread, which they break for the hunger of the world. Thus transfigured sorrow, as well as forgiven sin, may bring its box of alabaster ointment ‘. . . And bathe the Saviour’s feet with costly spikenard and with tears.’

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STUDY I

For if these things be in you and abound, they make you that you shall neither be idle nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.—2 PET. i. 8.

IN a previous work¹ we dealt with the monumental passage which precedes and leads up to our text. We traced the evolution of Christian character from its inception through all its ascending steps till it issued in that all-embracing love which is the fulfilment of the law. The dominant note of the text is fruitfulness, so that clearly the growth and development of Christian character from seed to flower are but means to an end—an end that must be diligently sought. Indeed, diligence seems to be the ruling thought in this epistle—the one thing needful in those to whom it is addressed. The word translated ‘diligence’ occurs no less than five times in the three chapters of which the epistle consists. ‘Giving all *diligence* in your faith supply virtue.’ ‘Give the more *diligence* to making your calling and your election sure.’ ‘I will give

¹ *The Summits of the Soul.*

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diligence that ye may be able after my decease to call these things to remembrance.' 'Looking for and hastening (or looking diligently) for the coming of the day of God.' 'Seeing that ye look for these things, be *diligent*.' In addition to these incitements to diligence, the Apostle twice declares his desire 'to stir up their pure minds by way of remembrance.' Clearly, then, according to Peter, the ideal Christian life is not one of easy-going unconcern, as though salvation were a thing already achieved. It is not

To rest in a golden grove,
And to bask in a summer sky;

it is a culture calling for the most wakeful, watchful, workful energies of mind and will. We do not drift into moral excellence. The currents of circumstance do not set in that direction. They rather head downwards to disaster and doom. It is only through fierce and hand-to-hand combat with the forces of evil that character can ever come to perfection of symmetry and strength. And even then, as we have seen, this is not the end. This gathering up of all the virtues into pure and purifying personalities is merely preparatory, instrumental, and contributory to universal and far-reaching issues which the ages shall yet unfold.

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Hence, lest we should imagine that at any stage of our spiritual evolution we may sit down in self-complacent admiration of our attainments, and fall into idle and effortless ways, Peter reminds us that the mighty dynamic acquired through the cumulative process he has traced must be turned to working ends. It must justify its bestowal by becoming productive. Life becomes forfeit to the giver when it fails in fruit. We are simply stewards who will be held accountable for all loss and waste.

And here, let us remind ourselves, the waste is not material, but moral and spiritual—not merely that of gold and silver, but of human souls. The problem of the Church, as of the world, is that of the unemployed—or, as Peter calls them, 'the idle and unfruitful.' Who can doubt for a moment that if the merely honorary members of the Church were to become active members we should witness the most startling results? The extraordinary thing is that men who know that every other department of life must be administered with watchful diligence, if it is to be made a success, fall under the delusion of supposing that the religious life will unfold itself automatically, and its ends be attained without labour or care. We all recognize that in common life engagements have to be met, promises to be fulfilled, correspondence

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attended to, old clients humoured, and new ones sought, if we are to hold our own in the world of men. We dare not be 'idle or unfruitful' in our knowledge of this world. Everything we know or can discover about the markets or the seasons, about gluts and shortages, whether at home or abroad, is acquired and pressed into service, and played or worked for all it is worth in the great game of life. And yet we commit the egregious error of supposing that all the mighty and far-reaching interests of the kingdom of God can be left to spare moments, chance moods, and such unconsidered fragments of time and attention as we can afford from what we call the main business of life. We imagine that we can play fast and loose with all its tremendous trusts, dally with its majestic opportunities, and trifle with its momentous issues without imperilling our status and forfeiting our chartered rights.

Why should we imagine that the affairs of the soul should thus pursue an inverted order—that the kingdom of God is a great exception, and that it gives a premium for idleness and neglect? In this higher stewardship of things spiritual and divine we are defaulters all, in a greater or less degree. Sooner or later we must face the audit, and when we do we shall discover to our confusion

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that the kingdom of God is no loose, unorganized, and slipshod system, from which obligation has been evaporated, and life reduced to the free-and-easy conditions of a go-as-you-please tournament. Nay ; it is under law ; and every business man knows that the law is nowhere so stern and unbending in its demands for fidelity as in the fulfilment of fiduciary relations. We may do what we like with our own, but a trust must be administered with inflexible rectitude. The religious life, with its knowledge of God, is a great and solemn stewardship, not only to be guarded from loss, but to be unfolded with fidelity, and strenuously worked to the divinest and humanest ends.

The perpetual peril of the Church, then, is that of falling into idle and effortless ways—of becoming selfishly absorbed in its own well-being, which it thereby defeats, and thus exposes itself to the doom of the unemployed. Now let us unfold, if possible, the meaning of this phrase, ‘idle and unfruitful’ in (or unto) the ‘knowledge of our Lord.’ Not only is the possibility of such knowledge assumed by the Apostle, but he implies that to those for whom this instruction is given it is already a real and conscious possession. Precisely all that Peter meant we may not be able to ascertain ; but the very least he must have intended to

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convey by these words was such a God-consciousness as left the soul no shadow of a doubt, either as to the reality of its relation to the Divine, or as to the obligations which that relation involved. 'Knowledge of the Lord' meant then, and ever must mean, to become the receiving centre of great spiritual forces, making for both private and personal purity and self-sacrificing social service. To know Christ must be interpreted as the equivalent of knowing God. 'If ye had known Me,' said Christ to Philip, 'ye should have known My Father also'; and again, 'He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father.'

Now, thus to come to the knowledge of God through Christ is not a mere intellectual achievement. It is to pass through a great moral crisis—to know the inrush of a great liberating movement, and to become conscious of a fine moral reinforcement. It is to come into the sweep of vast mystic forces, which enfold the soul in their warm embrace till there stirs within it a new spiritual consciousness. In a word, the Holy Ghost comes upon it, the power of the Highest overshadows it, and lo! it is born of the Spirit. It opens its eyes upon another world, and thrills through all its pulses with a new and a vivid life, which it at once perceives to be the 'life indeed.' 'For this is

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eternal life, to know Him, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom He hath sent.' It is life lifted to its highest power—life made rich with possibilities, and with an infinite field for their unfolding spread out before its view. Then it is that the soul discovers for the first time that it is not only fitted and furnished for flight, but that here, and here alone, in the atmosphere of divine light and love, are the ample spaces for the stroke of its mighty pinion—here alone the assisting air that can answer to the beat of its urgent wings. Such a knowledge is immediate and personal, and in the very nature of things not transferable. To its possessors it is the most deeply real and sacred fact of consciousness. It comes with such self-accrediting force and satisfaction of assurance that in comparison with it all other certitudes become shadowy, illusive, and unreal. It illuminates the mind, warms the heart, quickens the soul, and even thrills the body with exquisite delight. The whole nature owns its master, and rejoices in the conscious incoming of its Lord. In these moments of God-consciousness, self is absorbed into the infinite, divinely possessed and controlled :

Love takes up the harp of life, and smites on all the chords with might;
Smites the chord of Self, that, trembling, passes in music out of sight.

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Those who have been made partakers of this exalted experience know that both a new quality and a new quantity have been added to their lives. The entrance of these plus powers has the effect of lifting every natural endowment to the highest degree of efficiency, so that a man can become more, dare more, do more, endure more as a result of their coming into residence.

We set forth the scope and scale of this divine indwelling thus strongly that it may appear how criminal a waste it becomes to be 'idle and unfruitful' in regard to so magnificent a moral asset. And now let us turn back for a moment to the starting-point, that we may see the progress of the Apostle's thought : ' Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ ; Grace and peace be multiplied to you through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, according as His divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him that hath called us to glory and virtue ; whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises ; that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through

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lust. And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance patience, and to patience godliness, and to godliness brotherly-kindness, and to brotherly-kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that you shall be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.' This metaphor of fruitfulness is no sudden transition of thought, no figure that simply swam into Peter's mind as he was writing, and that he instantly seized and pressed into service, without its having any necessary relation to what had gone before. On the contrary, it was all the time at the back of his brain, controlling the whole range of his thinking from the start, though it never emerges till the eighth verse. Accepting this key, we shall now see how finely it fits into the wards of the locks and opens the door to Peter's thought.

Here is the soil of the human soul—the divinely selected seed-plot of God's great redeeming purpose in Jesus Christ. That soil, however, being already occupied with alien products, has first of all to be cleared of its noxious and unwholesome growths. This is a negative process, and is covered by the phrase in an earlier part of this chapter, 'Having escaped the corruption that is in the world through

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lust.' Now, this word 'escaped' may easily mislead us through its common usage in a double sense. We speak, for instance, of a man's escaping imprisonment, against whom a serious charge has been brought without its being sustained. But we also speak of a man's escaping imprisonment, who breaks out of jail. Of course in severely classical English we should mark the distinction between these two widely different kinds of escape by the preposition 'from' so that they could never be confused. Now, while the Authorized Version would leave us in doubt as to which of these two interpretations to adopt, the Revised gives us no option, but is emphatic, and by inserting the preposition fully brings out the force of the original, in which the preposition occurs. Peter was not writing to people who had never known the bondage of evil habit, people who had been sheltered from corrupting contact with the world. He was not concerned about these pure souls a few of whom in every age have walked in white, and escaped the defiling touch of sin, keeping themselves unspotted from the world. His business was with the general—men in whose hearts gluttony, caprice, adultery, and all kinds of excess had held high revel, and from the soil of whose lives harvests of corruption had been reaped. Into

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such a soil as this, cleared of its unhallowed growths, had been cast the seed of God's redeeming purposes. The mighty possibilities of becoming partakers of the divine nature had been thickly sown in the shape of 'exceeding great and precious promises,' received by faith, and as seed, into the soil of the heart.

Here, then, lies the importance of our preposition. These mighty reaches of perfection in life and service are offered not only to those who have never wasted their precious forces in the production of evil growth. They are open to us all, however much we may have run to waste and wickedness. What a glorious gospel is this ! ' He is able to save to the very uttermost all that come unto God by Him.' Of course, it may be said, and with truth, that it is one thing to receive the seed of divine promise into the virgin soil of a heart unspoiled by evil growths, and with none of its forces spent in producing worse than worthless crops ; but that it is quite another thing to offer that seed a heart that has exhausted its love in unworthy objects, and has been the field of a thousand malignant growths. All of which may be perfectly true, as it is also true that there are some lives the soil of which is so poor and hungry as to be naturally incapable of producing even weeds.

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But the all-sufficient answer to this is the fertilizer. A great wheat-grower told the writer recently of some West Australian land that was so scrubby, sandy, and apparently unprolific, that it looked incapable of carrying a rabbit to the acre ; but with the fertilizer can be made to stand thick with heavy-headed corn. A man might well look at such a tract of country, and say to the struggling and starving settler, ‘Add fertilizers to your soil ; for if these things be in it and abound, they will make it that it will be neither idle nor unfruitful in the production of grain.’

Let us look again to the fertilizers in this great passage—faith, virtue, knowledge, self-control, patience, godliness, brotherly-kindness, love ! Here, then, is the soil—the human heart ; here is the seed—the divine word of promise, holding within it all the potencies of the divine nature ; and here are the fertilizers, these mighty forces of the unseen world which seek and find their field in the hearts and lives of men. ‘For this very cause’ (that is fruitfulness), says Peter, ‘add these to your life, or make provision for them in the quality of your faith ; and then, thus divinely fertilized, ye shall neither be idle nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.’

From what we have already seen it would appear

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very plain that the same great laws as are observed at work in the kingdom of men control the administration of the kingdom of God. The translation of knowledge into conduct is ever the condition of its retention, to say nothing of its increase. To fail in doing what we know is presently to fail in knowing what to do. Obedience thus becomes the key to all further acquisition in every realm. Look at it on the plane of physical knowledge. To know nature we must obey nature. All our so-called subjugation of nature is really only a misnomer. It is a convenient term, of course, and exceedingly flattering to our vanity; but as a matter of fact, whatever mastery we may seem to have acquired is the fruit of our obedience. We have everywhere to line up with Nature's laws; and obey her word of command. She never steps aside for us to pass, nor adjusts herself to our requirements. All the adjustment must be on our side; we have to accommodate ourselves to her. She cannot by threat or bribe be made to swerve a hair's-breadth from her course. If we want her help we must go her way, and be careful that we keep in step; else we shall be either blocked, or blown aside as an impertinence and of no concern. We have learnt, and are still learning, these things through pain and tears and death.

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The pathway of human progress is white with the bones of countless pioneers. The martyrs of science are as numerous as those of religion. Other men laboured, and suffered, and died, that we might enter into our present inheritance. The tragedy of the thing is that we commit the same errors, but without the same excuse. They erred unwittingly, we often in the face of light and knowledge. Railway men, tramway men, miners, sailors, and all who follow perilous callings, are perpetually taking needless risks and thus exposing themselves and others to accidents and death. In almost every great catastrophe it is found upon inquiry that some one was 'idle and unfruitful [in the knowledge]' of the system he was trusted to administer.

The fatal factor, impossible of elimination, no matter how ideally perfect a system may be, is that it has to be administered by imperfect and fallible men. It is at this point that the opening occurs wide enough to admit anything and everything that can possibly happen in the way of disaster. By far the largest proportion of the misery brought about by accident, disease, and death arises from failure on the part of men to do what they know.

All progress in art, science, invention, in industrial,

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agricultural, and mining appliances and machinery, in the navigation of sea and air, and in the thousand and one applications of knowledge to the multiplied needs of men, must be interpreted as the fruit of diligence in doing the things that we know. To this must be attributed our advance in medicine, surgery, and sanitation, and our insight into the causes and consequent prevention and cure of disease.

By using the known as a stepping-stone to the unknown, and by being obedient to the scientific vision as it has been revealed, we have had still more unveiled, with the result that human life has been correspondingly enlarged, enriched, and prolonged.

Now, it is precisely for the application of this principle in the spiritual realm that Peter is pleading in this passage. The failure of the Church to translate her knowledge into life and conduct has resulted in confiscations which have impoverished, almost to destitution, her intelligence department, so that in relation to the cause and cure of social wrongs she is often as ignorant as a child.

Her lack of insight and foresight is due entirely to impairment of faculty following on disuse. She has failed to assimilate the knowledge of her

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Lord, and to make it her own for the realization of His far-reaching and imperial ends. She has been too content to dwell in a region of first principles, a sort of kindergarten stage of signs and symbols, to the spiritual significance of which she has rarely pierced. Her knowledge has not kept pace with her expansion. The business of the Church is not merely to supply the heart of the world with pure and purifying emotions, but to fertilize the brain of the world with clear and clarifying thought. She stands not only for deep feeling, but for high thinking. In Christ are 'hid' not merely the treasures of moral and spiritual energy, but 'all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge' (Col. ii. 3). The word translated 'hid' in this passage is the technical term among Greek writers for secret teaching reserved for the initiated alone, and the implication is that there are degrees of knowledge which are graduated to the degrees of development attained in the spiritual life—that life which, like an ocean of illimitable thought and feeling everywhere, underspreads the things we touch and see, and on which the whole universe is afloat.

STUDY II

For if these things be in you and abound, they make you that you shall neither be idle nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.—2 PET. i. 8.

IN our ignorance we attempt to make sharp distinctions between material and spiritual, secular and sacred; but many of these are purely arbitrary. They have no more existence in fact than parallels of latitude, or meridians of longitude. In science what we call matter is capable of sublimation by chemical processes till it passes into spirit, and what is spirit can materialize into visible and tangible forms. It appears to be merely a question of vibration in higher or lower degree. In like manner spirituality of life, sanctity of personal character, and purity of intention, emerge in national life as wise government, sagacious foresight, humane legislation, remedial discipline, and social justice. Thus while it is not the function of the Church directly to control the State, it is her business to inspire with lofty ideals and sustain with moral energies the personalities who shall in turn gather

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up and focus these in free and progressive institutions. Thus, by bringing down and applying to things of earth the wisdom of heaven, is she to make the kingdom of God co-extensive with the kingdom of man.

The great social problems that are vexing the spirits of statesmen and philanthropists the whole world round are questions which the Church herself has been instrumental in provoking. For the most part she has never measured the full meaning of her own message, nor relied upon it as the line of an invincible though invisible force. She has trusted in a score of substitutes—princely patronage, political power, social prestige, persecution, wealth, learning, eloquence, intrigue, in fact anything and everything but the wisdom that cometh from above, and the power that works by love.

If she would lead the masses to the Christ who died for them, let her like Moses fling down her rod—the symbol of power ; and lo ! it will become a serpent—the symbol of wisdom. Then let her grasp this double gift, and it will become in her hand a wonder-working force, breaking the tyranny of the oppressor and setting the captives free. Too long has she stood like a child bewildered and scared amid apparitions and unknown forces which she herself has evoked.

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Through her own delinquency she finds herself unable to read the signs of the times. Had she been but loyal to the great principle of development which we have been endeavouring to trace, then had she been able to read the portents of the moral sky. Then, too, some of the darkest passages in human history would never have been written. She would have been spared some of the saddest defections from her ranks, and the scandal of division into a multitude of mutually hostile and competing camps.

Paul was able to say, 'We have the mind of Christ,' a phrase which, if it meant anything, meant at least a share in the Eternal thought and purpose, an inside knowledge of God's working plans for the redemption of the race.

In a more or less blundering fashion the Church has pushed her way to a measure of conquest ; but when we remember that infinite power, coupled with infinite intelligence, has been banked to her credit, and that it is ever ready at call, then how lamentably and ludicrously disproportionate appear her results ! Either she does not possess these assets, or having them she fails to draw upon her account. Does any one dream that she could be so tongue-tied and perplexed in the face of these great problems if she were what she claims to be, the medium of divine wisdom and love ?

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But the Church consists of individuals, and the corporate body can be no better or wiser than the personal units of which it is composed. The question that we each should ask and have answered is, 'How far are we individually responsible for the Church's inefficiency?' Let us address ourselves to the work of adjustment, lest by default we subtract from her power. All power is vested in our Divine Head, and for weakness we have no excuse. The feeblest among us may become as David, and the house of David as the angel of the Lord.

We have seen that the knowledge spoken of in the text was assumed by the Apostle to be the conscious possession of those to whom he wrote. But the knowledge of God, like every other knowledge, becomes immediately on its attainment something more than a possession—it is straightway an obligation. Instead of being rested in as an end, it has to be applied to ends, which without it cannot be achieved. Every new truth thus becomes a new trust, default in which is always followed by its inevitable and appropriate penalty. To keep one's knowledge and practice apart is to impetril them both. It is to divide the life against itself, and thus to halve its force. Even the work it does achieve under such conditions is done with the

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maximum of friction and the minimum of success. It is, moreover, to live under perpetual self-rebuke. A man can bear up against the 'slings and arrows of outrageous fortune'—he can hold his own against the world, with the consciousness of right regnant in his heart :

His strength is as the strength of ten,
Because his heart is pure.

Such a consciousness knits all the nature into splendid unity, and enables it to stand whole in itself and four-square to all the winds that blow. But when a man's knowledge and his conduct are at quarrel, when he turns a deaf ear to the voice of duty, and closes his eyes to the kindly light, he finds in time of attack no foothold within himself from which he can set up and conduct a successful defence.

The only way to retain knowledge is to turn it to account—to translate it into life. Here, as everywhere, not to use is to lose. To be idle in the knowledge of God may mean one or both of two things : either to neglect to embody in character and conduct what has been apprehended of the divine requirement, or failure to pass it on, thus defeating the purpose for which it was bestowed—so that the knowledge finds itself entrapped in a

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sort of spiritual dead-end, caught in a veritable cul-de-sac. Idleness not only disqualifies from further acquisition, it cancels the right of continued possession of what has been already acquired. When the owner of one talent in the parable neglected to invest it profitably, he not only failed to secure any interest, but he forfeited the principal. All knowledge, of course, is not of equal worth, but as it rises in the scale of value, the obligation to use it wisely and reproductively becomes correspondingly increased.

Imagine, if you can, a medical man being a witness of an accident in which a fellow creature, through the ignorance of the bystanders, was being allowed slowly to bleed to death, and declining, through indolence, meanness, or unconcern, to proffer his professional skill. In such a case, to be idle and unfruitful in the knowledge of his art would be criminal indeed. And yet in how many instances have we—whose souls are the seat and centre of divine communication, we who know there is pardon for the guilty and power in prayer—seen our fellow creatures without God and without hope in the world, and either through false delicacy or the fear of man failed to pass on the word of life and hope? This, then, is the condemnation, not that men do not know, but that they do not

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apply their knowledge. Christ gathers up the whole philosophy of life, and packs it into one pregnant phrase: 'If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.'

Take any of the thousand and one violations of statute law which occur every day throughout the world of men, and how low a percentage are due to ignorance! It may be doubted whether in one case out of a hundred such a plea could be truthfully urged. Men know the law, that is to say, but they are not fruitful in their knowledge. Or again, look at the violations of physical law which fill the accident-wards of our hospitals; but seldom, if ever, is ignorance the underlying cause. I have gone from bed to bed, and found in case after case that there had been nothing defective in the realm of knowledge. Railway men, tramway men, miners, builders, factory hands, all know that steam will scald, that dynamite will explode, that acids and gases and electric wires must be handled with caution and care. The regulations under which they work are neither framed, nor are they needed, to instruct them as to the fact or the nature of the perils they face. These regulations have had to be prepared and posted for the sole purpose of compelling men, even under threats of fines and dismissal, to do what they know.

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Only those who have had to do with workers know what perpetual risks they take, in spite of the fullest knowledge; and to the man who lies with a shattered limb in the hospital it is always an added misery to reflect that if he had only done what he had known and what his regulations required him to do or avoid—in other words, if he had not been 'idle and unfruitful' in his knowledge, then he need not have been where he finds himself, and that therefore he alone is to blame. Now all this applies with equal if not added force with regard to knowledge in the spiritual realm, as we shall undertake to show.

How many of us can truthfully plead ignorance as an excuse for our numerous falls in which we have sustained moral damage and defeat? There are thousands of professing Christians disabled and disqualified for service in the cause of God and humanity through simple disloyalty to the light they had.

The Church through all ages and in all her ranks has been weakened, discredited, and often worsted in her conflict with the forces of evil—not through want of knowledge, but through fatal failure to translate her knowledge into life. The sword must be turned inwards against this vice of spiritual indolence. There may be excuse sometimes

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for being out of employment in the industrial, professional, or commercial world; but in the spiritual realm, never! To be unemployed there becomes a double sin. First, it is a wrong wrought against one's own soul in arresting its development and threatening its life. And, secondly, it is a wrong against society, to which we owe the debt of passing on the torch of life. To know God, to catch the vision of the ideal, to see it gleaming before us with beckoning finger, to feel the constraint of its mighty and majestic imperative, to catch the still small voice of duty from behind saying, 'This is the way, walk ye in it,' and to feel the forward pressure of her hand, and yet fail to respond, is to turn the kindly light of knowledge into an avenging and tormenting flame.

You can understand the self-accusation of a man who, possessing knowledge that would have saved a fellow creature from the gallows, yet withheld his evidence and allowed an innocent man to be hanged. You can picture the misery of a medical man who, after all his years of training, allows through carelessness or neglect a valuable life to slip through his hands. But who can imagine the utter remorse that will await the soul which has been the recipient of all these sweet and gracious forces which flow out from the great heart of God,

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and yet has turned them to no social or serviceable ends ?

To know Christ, with all the vital and vitalizing energy which that knowledge carries and connotes, and yet to seal that knowledge up within the breast and permit it no practical play, is to default in the most sacred trust that can be committed to a human soul. Moreover, it must be remembered that the pardon for sin and the gift of spiritual life and light are not once-and-for-all endowments. We hold them in trust ; and to play fast and loose with them—to fail to unfold their inwrought possibilities—to forget that we are stewards, and to waste by idleness and neglect the ‘ manifold grace of God ’ will be to cancel our stewardship and have it withdrawn. Our sense of ‘ justification by faith ’ can be kept clear only as it issues and completes itself in our further ‘ justification by works.’ To fail of this last is to imperil the first. Listen ! ‘ He that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sin.’ So that here the great truth emerges that not to carry knowledge forward is to lose it. The materials which go to make up the sum of our knowledge are supplied by memory. Plunge memory into Lethe, and you have dealt a death-blow to the fullest and most accurate

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knowledge and cast it into blind oblivion. This is the tragic issue of mere indolence. It is the penalty for idleness and unfruitfulness in the knowledge of God that this knowledge is withdrawn. He who once knew the joy of conscious pardon and proves disloyal to the law of spiritual reproduction falls back into the condemnation of a deeper doom.

Here, then, is the great truth which our text affirms and which all experience confirms, that unused knowledge deteriorates, and that not to use is to lose. Samuel Taylor Coleridge has crystallized this truth into an aphorism as forceful as it is familiar: 'Truths at once the most awful and interesting are often regarded as so true that they lose all the power of truth and lie bedridden in the dormitory of the soul side by side with the most despised and exploded errors.'

Now, for the truths that go to make up the sum of human knowledge, and which the intellect fashions into systems of thought, we are dependent on the memory. Memory may be defined as the power by which we reproduce past impressions. Impair the memory, therefore, and to that extent you straightway invalidate the knowledge of which it is the source and fount. Apart from memory knowledge is inconceivable. Memory must supply knowledge with all its raw material. To be idle in

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the realm of knowledge is to leave unutilized all the stores that memory has acquired. But these stores, unless continually turned over, tend to deteriorate. The memory loses grip of facts which it is never required to recall. Thus knowledge and memory mutually react upon and reinforce one another, and any deterioration of either means the impairment of both.

Let us look at these words one by one for a moment, in the order in which Peter has employed them : ' He that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off.' Now, this looks at first sight like an anticlimax. After saying that a man is blind, to say that he cannot see afar off would be a quite superfluous piece of information. If he be blind, then, of course, he cannot see afar off—nor near at hand, for the matter of that. Then why this lack of order in a passage which up till now has been so finely natural in its sequence and so progressively cumulative in the march of its thought ? Some critics have endeavoured to explain the difficulty by suggesting that Peter intentionally adopted an inverted order for the purpose of giving force to his argument, and that to understand the true sequence of his thought we must start with loss of memory and work back through near-sightedness to the awful culmination

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in total blindness. Thus it is stated by one great authority: 'The degrees of relapse are depicted by a felicitous inversion of style. Such person forgets the cleansing of his old sins; second, he loses sight of present privileges; and third, he is altogether blind to future ones. The inversion consists in considering the future, present, and past in preference to the past, present, and future.'

Now, it may seem presumptuous to dare to dispute with the critics on a point which they appear to have settled so satisfactorily to themselves; yet apart from the fact that the so-called 'felicitous inversion of style' has no precedent in Greek composition, let it be pointed out that the alleged inverted order is an explanation rendered necessary by the translation which has been adopted, but the need for which entirely disappears if a sounder and juster method be pursued. The fact is that neither the phrase in the Authorized Version, 'Cannot see afar off,' nor that in the Revised Version, 'Seeing only what is near,' literally translates the original. For that literal translation we have to look into the margin of the Revised Version, where it is rendered by the phrase—'Closing his eyes.'

Now, if this rendering be lifted from the margin and fitted into its proper setting in the text, all

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necessity for such a violent suggestion as an 'inverted order' is at once removed.

Blindness is not necessarily associated with closed eyes. 'Closing the eyes' is employed by the Apostle to mark a further stage of darkness. How often have we seen the blind roll round their sightless orbs in pathetic search of some faint illuminating gleam, straining with wide-open eyes that perchance some radiance might stimulate the perished nerve and beget the consciousness of light !

Especially is this the case where hope of restored vision has not for ever died out of the heart. But when the blind, no longer cherishing expectation, supplement their loss by shutting down their lids, and keeping them shut, they have reached a stage where hope has perished, or, what is worse, desire is dead.

And this we conceive to be the order of Peter's thought. To him the closing of the eyes is an advance on blindness. Blindness does not necessarily engage the will, but closing the eyes does. The last is a voluntary act by which finality is given to the darkening process—an act of moral abandon, in which the soul accepts and acquiesces in its doom.

The word 'blind' in this connexion must be

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held equivalent to losing the vision of the Ideal. The process seems to be this. The Ideal stands before us with its beckoning hand. It is at once an inspiration and a challenge. There it shines in all its fair and flawless beauty, as taught in the words and lived in the life of Him who was the 'holiest among the mighty and the mightiest among the holy.'

Not to respond to this upward call is to live under the lash of its reproof. But the eye will refuse to continue looking at that which is a perpetual rebuke, and what it declines to see it will presently be unable to see. This is the law of judicial blindness, which always sets in on disloyalty to the light. There is a common phrase that the eye sees only what it brings the power of seeing. I would go further, and say that the eye sees only what it wills to see. That is to say, there must be the exercise of the will, in order to see in the perceiving sense. We can see a thing without seeing it.

There are ten thousand things every day that paint themselves on the retina, but wake up no corresponding consciousness in the brain. They stimulate the nerve endings, but never report themselves at the nerve centres, because the mind or will is otherwise employed. You may have a

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thousand faces before you at the railway station, and yet be blind to all but one. We can thus cultivate a blindness which is open-eyed. Indeed, a man must do so if he is to get successfully through the business of a single day. Just as in the use of the telephone, out of a number of calls and counter-calls one selects the familiar voice with which he desires to hold communication, and at once cuts out all beside; so the eye selects its object, and cuts out sights that are not desired. But in morals, to cut out the highest is to grow content with the low. This loss of the ideal from the field of vision means the tyranny of the actual. The vanishing of the distant makes us the victims of the near. When our vision does not exceed our reach, there is no demand made upon the higher functions of the soul, no clear call of duty cutting across the pathway of desire. But the faculty that is not challenged and functioned perishes through disuse. Here, then, is the Ideal—participation in the divine nature—not simply freedom from evil taint and trend, but such a complete reversal of the moral gear as will not merely fetch life up on the down-grade and bring it to a stand, but motor it on the up-grade, and make it push its way from stage to stage and scale the heights of moral purity and power.

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But these heights can be worked towards only as they can be seen, and they can be seen only as they are believed in. The eye of the soul, which is faith, must be fed on distance. Faith must be fixed on that which is afar, or that which is afar will fade from sight and lose its power to gird the soul for high endeavour. In other words, the eye will become blind to the possible, blind to those serene and snow-clad heights which lift themselves in awful purity apart, smiting us through with conscious guilt, and dwarfing us into moral littleness; blind to all the gleaming ideals that beckon while they abash and constrain, even while they confound. The process of this blindness is as subtle as it is sure. There is only one way of escape,—cherish the ideal and work towards it with toil of heart, and knees, and hands. Better to be beaten back a thousand times wounded and sore, but with your face towards the heights, than to tread the dead-levels of indifferent acquiescence, or to move unresistingly down the slopes of unstinted desire.

ESSENTIAL SIN

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He shall convict the world of sin . . . because they believe not on Me.—JOHN xvi. 8, 9.

‘**B**ELIEF’ and ‘unbelief’ in the Scriptures never denote mental, but moral, conditions or attitudes. Hence the merit or demerit which they everywhere respectively carry. ‘He that believeth shall be saved; he that believeth not shall be condemned.’ Now there could not possibly be any moral merit in intellectually assenting to a proposition, nor could dissent carry any moral blame, for the simple reason that the will in such matters is not engaged. But all moral deviation resides in the region of the will, so that apart from volition there can be no such thing as sin. Indeed, Martineau has pushed this to such an extreme that he practically absolves habitual sin from its guilt, on the ground that it is often committed in opposition to the will, or at least without its concurrence.

But a man is not only responsible for the immediate results of his actions, whether in himself or

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in others, but also for the remote. That he did not calculate the far-reaching issues of his wrong-doing when committing himself to sinful courses can hardly be reckoned an extenuating circumstance. The penalty has to be borne by some one, and if not by him, then by whom? Besides, if wrong-doing by becoming habitual loses all its moral blame, then by the same reasoning right-doing by becoming habitual must lose all its moral credit, which would be absurd.

Now in the text, 'He shall convict the world of sin,' it looks at first sight as though we should have to interpret the word 'world' in a very limited sense, confining it to those to whom has been made the revelation of the historic Christ. For, clearly, where there is no knowledge of Him there can be no rejection, and where there is no rejection there can be no sin in this particular regard. On this assumption, therefore, in order that the 'world' may come into condemnation, it must first of all know about Christ, and then reject Him; for rejection is the moral equivalent of unbelief. 'If I had not done among them the works that none other man did, they had not had sin; but now they have both seen and hated both Me and My Father.' And again, 'If ye were blind ye would have no sin.' But these words

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were spoken to men who had seen Christ. They had witnessed His mighty works and listened to His mightier words. But think for a moment of the millions that were living then, and that have lived through all the centuries since, and are living now, who have never even heard the Saviour's name. How can these be chargeable with 'unbelief' or rejection of that which was never proffered to their minds and hearts? It certainly looks at first sight as though we should have to place a very narrow interpretation on the Saviour's words in our text, and as if the sphere of the Spirit's operation were anything but commensurate with the 'world.'

Indeed, the Apostle Paul, in one of the few arguments in which he puts all the steps of his cogent reasoning, seems to be leading us to this very conclusion, till all at once he bursts upon us with a conclusion of startling surprise. Listen: 'Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How, then, shall they call on Him on whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach except they be sent? . . . But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, "Lord, who hath

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believed our report ? " So, then, faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.'

Now what is the natural and expected conclusion from this piece of reasoning ? Is it not that we ought to send out at once the tidings of salvation, that all who have not listened to the message may hear the joyful sound ? But this is just what the Apostle does not say. His conclusion, instead of being an injunction to make known the truth to the world, is an indictment of the world, that, knowing the truth, it has not obeyed. ' But I say, Have they not heard ? Yea, verily, their sound went into all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.'

Clearly, then, the influence of Jesus Christ is not limited to those who have heard His name. It is the universal though unrecognized possession of every human soul. Every man carries about with him as an inalienable part of his moral outfit a standard of right and wrong ; an inward illumination on all questions of moral behaviour ; an arbiter of conduct before which his intentions may be arraigned, and, according to their quality, justified or condemned. In short, every man has his moral ideal. That his actual falls far below it, does not destroy or dislodge it. Nothing can ever do that.

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It remains in all its austere and unalterable rectitude to measure the distance of his descent. To that incorruptible witness every man owes his allegiance. That 'is the true Light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world.' Loyalty to that Light is loyalty to Jesus Christ, and disloyalty to it is sin against Him. Now, when John calls Christ the 'True Light,' the word 'True' is not to be construed in this passage as the antithesis of 'false,' but rather as the synonym of the Ideal. Thus interpreted, Jesus Christ becomes identical with the moral ideal in every man, that is, with the best that the sincere seeker after light can know. Let him 'believe on' this, and seek to embody it in life and conduct, and he will be approved. Let there be, however, any default between the ideal and the actual in his behaviour, and at once the everywhere present Spirit flashes in His conviction of sin.

Now we have here a universal principle which will be found to rule alike in all realms. Take, for example, in the sphere of art some highly-gifted painter, beneath whose brush the colours palpitate with living warmth. He has lofty ideals, visions of the highest, that flood with many-coloured glories the chambers of his fancy—great truths which it is his mission to embody in art and thus reveal

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to the world. They press upon his spirit like the 'burden of the Lord' of which the prophets spoke, and he longs to become the fitting vehicle of their expression. But there meets him on the very threshold of this lofty ministry the demon of commercialism, who points out that to realize the ideal may be a very noble and praiseworthy resolve; but it will not boil the pot or pay the rent—that, as a matter of fact, the popular demand is for something lower than his best, and that if he is to achieve what the world calls 'success' he must abdicate in favour of the crowd. Let him yield to that temptation and prove false to his ideal, and at once the Spirit of Art will convince him of sin because, having seen the highest, he pursues it not.

This principle holds equally true in music. Beethoven is a fine example of a composer who was true to his ideal. Although during the first period of his production he caught the prevailing taste and became its reflex, he slowly but surely escaped from the tyranny of the actual, and flung himself heart and soul into the pursuit of the ideal. Thereby he came to his throne and achieved his right to rule. Wherever men see the noblest they feel the pull of its attraction, and are morally bound to obey. Not to do so is to live under constant

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rebuke. Listen to the sin-stricken Guinevere as she wails out her woe :

... Ah, my God,
What might I not have made of Thy fair world
Had I but loved Thy highest creature here ?
It was my duty to have loved the highest :
It surely was my profit had I known :
It would have been my pleasure had I seen.
We needs must love the highest when we see it.

Now Jesus stands for the highest and holiest in moral character. In Him goodness reached its culmination, and broke into its fairest and most fragrant flower. This is the verdict of history. The years come and go, but they witness no diminution in the interest that gathers round and centres in the Supreme Personality of history. Indeed, each century finds Him with a wider empire over human hearts, and brings fresh wealth of homage to lay as tribute at His feet. In His pure presence the loftiest in intellect become the lowliest in worship, and the higher the nature that comes to the study of His character, the more prostrate the reverence that uncovers, the more profound the love that adores.

Secure and impregnable in His incomparable supremacy He sits enthroned, ' far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, whether in this world or in that which is to come.'

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There is, it is true, a sense in which He for ever draws near to men, but there is also a sense in which He for ever recedes. If it be true that in His sweet reasonableness and human-hearted sympathy He mingles with and makes Himself the friend and companion of publicans and sinners, it is equally true that in the white radiance of His unapproachable sanctity He is uplifted and withdrawn from men, like some serene, solitary, and snowclad peak, and to such majestic heights of moral purity as must for ever dwarf all human perfections to the dust.

The birth of Jesus was to the world the birth of a new hope, a new ideal, and a new moral dynamic. The age into which Christ was born was an age which intellectually and morally was a spent force. By its own confession as expressed and recorded by its historians, philosophers, and poets it was a played-out age—an age decrepit and diseased at heart, an age that was hurrying downward to its doom. It was as though God had waited for this human extremity in order to heighten the splendour of the divine opportunity—waited for the wail of universal despair that He might strike in upon the bitter grief and despondency of men with the jubilant note of a new and victorious hope.

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There seems to be but one way to teach men the utter inadequacy of mere Nature to meet their demands, and that is to let them test her for themselves and find her out. This seems, indeed, to be one of the appointed ministries of Nature, to teach us through disillusionment and disappointment that we must look elsewhere for the fulfilment of 'those mighty hopes that make us men.'

Nature, like another John the Baptist, is ever true to her Lord. When questioned, she always confesses and denies not, saying, 'I am not the Christ.' Through human weariness and disgust, through the discipline of thwarted ambition and baffled hope, of defeated purpose and shattered plan, she is ever preparing the way of the Lord to the hearts and the lives of men.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to conceive what the world would have become had Jesus not been born, for He has created the freedom, the civilization, the intellectual vigour, and the strenuous moral forces which are everywhere making for the uplift of the race. Every movement that is working towards the amelioration of suffering and poverty, towards the giving of larger opportunity and more beneficent conditions of life and work among the poor, the vicious, and the down-trodden of humanity, springs directly or indirectly

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from Christ's life and work. His moral supremacy constitutes His claim, and it is only through surrender to that claim that human life can justify itself. This surrender is, as I have pointed out, the moral equivalent of belief; for belief in the New Testament sense is not merely mental assent, but moral consent.

A fine historic illustration of this principle in active work is seen in the first Christian sermon at Pentecost. In reading the report of Peter's address on that occasion one may be tempted to question its force and to marvel at its effects. But the fact is the more powerful a sermon is the less does it lend itself to the reporter. A sermon differs in this regard from every other product. There is a subtle element that refuses to be caught and fixed in type. You cannot report chain-lightning, and the sermon that can be reported without suffering in the process is a harmless thing. Let it be remembered, then, we have not Peter's sermon here, excepting in an evaporated form. If we could have listened to it, quivering under the spiritual dynamic with which it was charged, we should have understood how the cry was wrung from the heart of the crowd: 'Men and brethren, what shall we do?' There was great skill in the arrangement of this sermon. Peter commenced

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with a proposition that all were prepared to admit, 'Jesus Christ—a man.' Had he affirmed anything beyond Christ's mere manhood at the start, the probability is that he would not have been allowed to proceed, or, at any rate, would have alienated the sympathies of most of his hearers. But he adroitly begins at a point where they are all agreed ; and then at the last, focusing all the scattered rays of his reasoning to a burning point of declaration, he flings out the full-orbed truth, 'Let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God hath made this same Jesus whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.'

It was at this point that the Holy Spirit produced His conviction of sin in the hearts of the multitude. 'When they heard this they were pricked in their hearts, and said . . . "What shall we do?"' This was in direct fulfilment of our text. The crowning sin of the New Testament is unbelief, and unbelief reaches its awful climax in the rejection of Jesus Christ. But, as Peter suggests in a later sermon, it was through ignorance they did it. How far this was an extenuating circumstance in their case it is difficult to say; but let it be remembered that where knowledge is possible, ignorance is culpable. 'Every one that is of the truth,' said Christ, 'heareth My voice.' Had the

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leaders of thought in Christ's day been loyal to the truth as they knew it, we cannot conceive that they could have rejected Him. They would have brought to the study of Him and His work an unerring criterion of truth. But they had played fast and loose with conviction, with the result that their moral discrimination was at fault. We cannot tamper with our moral sensibilities and at the same time preserve them in good working order. We may say that we did not know; but then we ought to have known. It only shifts the responsibility further back; it does not get rid of it. Nor should it. A drunken man comes home, and in his insensate fury fatally injures his wife and child. But, says the counsel for the defence at the man's trial, 'he was irresponsible, because he did not know what he was doing.' To which the retort is obvious: 'He is responsible for having put himself into a condition which made such a tragedy possible.' So with those who rejected Christ in the days of His flesh. Long before His appearance they had been rejecting the truth for which Christ stood; and hence when Truth incarnate appeared, they failed to recognize His features or to understand His Words.

From all this we gather that unbelief and ignorance are related. Just as knowledge is the daughter

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of faith, so unbelief is the mother of ignorance. But unbelief, as we have seen, is never regarded in the Bible as a mental but as a moral quality. It is a condition of the heart, not of the head, and is therefore a revelation of moral character. Hence its culpability. That there are mental results which succeed on moral deterioration cannot be questioned. We cannot divorce the mental from the moral sphere. Man is a unity, and damage sustained in any department reduces the working power of the whole. Emerson says, 'All genius takes its rise in the mountains of rectitude.' Paul tells us that because men did not like to retain God in their knowledge 'God gave them over to a reprobate mind.' So that moral obliquity was found inducing mental obscurity. The work of reform, then, if it is to deal with causes instead of symptoms, must begin with the heart. It is the heart with which men believe unto righteousness. It was in the heart that the people felt the throb of pain which was the prelude to moral health and happiness.

There can be no true psychology of Pentecost which does not assign to the feelings a large and important place. Indeed, it is doubtful whether there could have been any Pentecost at all, unless the feelings had been melted and made to flow.

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There never has been a revival of any account, whether of art, letters, or religion, that did not originate in the realm of feeling. Professor James, in his remarkable work on *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, says: 'I do believe that feeling is the deepest source of religion, and that philosophic and theological formulas are secondary products, like translations of a text into another tongue. . . . When I call theological formulas secondary products I mean that, in a world in which no religious feeling ever existed, I doubt whether any philosophic theology could ever have been framed.' Of course there is a great deal of sentiment without any religion, but there can be no true religion without sentiment. To ignore the feelings is unscientific. They lie at the back of all achievement.

It is remarkable, however, that in no other department of life save that of religion are the feelings subjected to discredit. You may scream at a pantomime, roar out encores at a concert, and shout yourselves hoarse at a football match or a boat-race, and no one ever dreams of charging you with impropriety, or suggesting a tilt in your mental balance. But betray the slightest quiver of emotion in the matter of religion, and at once you become a sort of social suspect; eyebrows are elevated, whispered confidences are exchanged

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as to your mental soundness, and lips are curled in pitying contempt. You may be in deadly earnest about your business, and on perpetual stretch for the 'meat that perisheth,' but you must on no account let your temperature get above the most tepid stage on the question of religion, or allow yourself, except in the most languid fashion, to labour for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life. And yet, as a matter of fact, there is no other subject upon which a man is so justified in kindling to a glowing flame of enthusiasm. There is no question but that of religion which so appeals to the whole man, or which so unifies all his forces. It is in his relations to God that man discovers the only adequate field for the full and unrestricted exercise of his powers ; here alone are they lifted to their highest and reach their crown. A revival of feeling must always precede a revival of doing. It is the men of deep feeling that make history. It is through feeling that thought passes into action. Hence said the stricken multitude, ' Men and brethren, what shall we do ? ' They felt they must *do* something, that this feeling must not be allowed to evaporate—that it must be fixed and crystallized into some definite and morally committing act that would mark this moment off for ever as a crisis

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in their lives. Between their past and their future there would be a great gulf fixed. They felt that henceforth life would never be for them the same thing as it had been before. They had caught the voice and the vision of the Son of God. The conviction of their sin in rejecting Him had been flashed in upon their consciences, and to adjust their moral position to this new discovery was felt by them to be an inevitable and imminent need.

What was true for them is true for every man. No one after receiving such a manifestation can remain morally the same. The revelation to a person's mind and conscience of Christ's claims creates a moral crisis in his history. It shows him where he is and where he ought to be, and challenges his will to a decision. He must needs do something with Christ. There is no neutrality possible; and any attempt to evade the point at issue, and allow choice to go by default, resolves itself into an attitude of positive rejection. We cannot escape the onus of a formal determination by waiving this question, for 'He that is not with Me is against Me,' is the Master's own formula of moral classification. Every sermon we hear, every invitation to which we listen, every fine impulse that we receive, is thus contributing to fix our

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moral character here and our everlasting condition hereafter. Well may we ask, in view of such issues, 'Men and brethren, what must we do?'

To this question there is but one reply: 'Repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ,' this is the supreme requirement. Or as Paul on a later day declared, in answer to the jailer's cry: 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.'

A great many mentally accord Christ the supremacy, and go into raptures over His character, but the requirement of the text is one of moral attitude and adjustment. Mental assent to Christ's claims, coupled with moral aloofness and default, is the very ground of condemnation, because it is treason to the best we know. The act of belief, then, is not the mere giving of your credence to a proposition, but the giving of yourself to a Person. To profess admiration of Jesus Christ, and offer Him cheap praise, while at the same time you withhold from Him your allegiance, betrays either insincerity of heart or perversity of will. The mission of the Holy Spirit is to work in us this consciousness of sin as default, by showing us the widening gulf that yawns between the ideal as expressed in Christ and the actual as

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embodied in ourselves. I say 'widening,' because this is essential to the notion of sin. Wherever a man is struggling to narrow that interval, however ineffectually, and against whatever odds, there is no condemnation. Whenever and wherever the will is set to achieve the best we know, the Spirit who searches all things must approve. It is in the field of a man's intentions that the judgement-seat is fixed. Condemnation will never be pronounced on a man's failure to subscribe to a set of merely intellectual propositions, or even on his inability to believe everything contained in the historical documents of Christianity. The question is, 'Has he been loyal to the best he knew, either as revealed from within or without?'—because to respond to the best wherever it is met, whether in picture, or poem, or personality—to uncover before it, to bow down, to confess it as divine, to give one's self to it, body, soul, and spirit—this is to be justified; while to ignore or oppose it is to stand divinely condemned.

God has built into the very structure of man's constitution the eternal standards of truth and righteousness. These are inalienable. They are among the organic instincts of his mental and moral being, without which he would not be a man. He thus carries about with him an incor-

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ruptible and indestructible revelation. He may resent it, resist it, reject it, and even violate it; but there it stands, the great, internal, luminous witness to the Divine—the truth of God set down amid all the untruths of his life, to put them to shame; and, whether opposed or ignored, never for one moment does it relinquish its claim upon his loyalty and love.

Hence the Holy Spirit's work is by no means limited to those to whom the gospel message has been made known. This is proved by the universal sin-consciousness of the race. In every age and country there has been a deeply wrought consciousness of guilt, and apprehension of trouble ahead, that no sceptical philosophy has ever been able to dislodge. Witness the penances and privations of men everywhere, and the smoking altars under every sky. Indeed, all that is deepest in human thought, truest in human instinct, mightiest in human endeavour, and most pathetic in human speech, all that has been linked with the supremest hopes or given birth to the direst fears of men, has been found to gather round this problem of human guilt, has been evoked by the deep and awful sense of wrong within the human soul. This sense of discord so universally felt and expressed is the work of that Holy Spirit of God, and is the

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necessary prelude to the harmony which it is His gracious ministry to restore.

It wonderfully lightens the problem of the heathen world to remember that over all its cruelty and chaos there broods the tender Spirit of God. Wherever in pagan lands there is a desire in any human heart to get square with its record, however mistaken the methods employed, the will to be righteous is accepted, and to such is granted the freedom of the kingdom of God. The everywhere-present Spirit is in ministering attendance, to cherish every noble impulse, to stimulate every high resolve, and to assist the ascent of the soul from moral darkness and death into the light and life of God. The heathen without exception have the consciousness of something better ever beckoning them on and up, and their sin, like ours, consists in not doing and becoming the best they know.

‘But,’ it may be asked, ‘if the heathen may thus, by loyalty to the light they have, attain to the citizenship of the kingdom of God, why trouble to send them the gospel at all?’ The reply is two-fold. First, because we are under orders. ‘Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature’ is the command of the Risen Christ to His Church, and the Church that fails

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to be aggressive weaves its own winding-sheet. In the interests of its own life, to say nothing of the lives of others, it must pass on the torch. To it has been committed the task of preparing the way of the Lord to the universal heart of man. But, secondly, it is no reason for withholding the sun of revelation because, forsooth, these nations are groping in the dim light of the stars. Those who move about in the moral twilight of truth surely have claims on us who enjoy its bright and broadening day. I suppose it would be possible for a visitor to London to make the approach to that city by way of the deep-drainage system, and doubtless by that dark and malodorous subway, with great care, he would ultimately arrive. But it is hardly a line that you would recommend to your friends. Indeed, it may be presumed that if you saw even a perfect stranger making an attempt in the belief that it was the only approach, you would hasten to point out a more excellent way.

So while men may be able to find their way to the Celestial City along the dark track of heathen rites and ceremonies, with all their cruel superstitions, surely we who know the highways to the City of God are under obligation to make them known.

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Will any one, who believes that God is in history, doubt that Great Britain, through her alliance with Japan, has had placed within her reach a great and noble opportunity of turning all this newly awakened and virile force into Christian channels and thus making it serve the highest ends? We do not forget, of course, that three hundred and fifty years ago Japan was exploited by Romanist missionaries, nor are we ignorant of the horrors that followed the reaction against the Catholic type of Christianity which, by the peculiar methods of the Jesuits, was then sought to be forced upon her to the disintegration of her national life. Neither East nor West is ever likely to forget how, at the call of her most gifted and far-seeing statesmen, Hideyoshi and Iyeyasu, Japan in the beginning of the seventeenth century threw off the Romish yoke and swept Christianity out of the dominion by the massacre of 300,000 native and foreign Christians. But this is no reason why the Protestant type of the Western faith, with its right of free thought and free speech, should not commend itself to the frank and open Japanese mind of to-day. For us to miss this opportunity will be to miss our destiny, and help to put back indefinitely the clock of history. Our alliance

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must of necessity, and whether we will or no, carry great moral issues both for us and them. For us to form a treaty merely for national aggrandisement, for the fostering of Imperial pride, for exploiting the products of that country, or making a market for our own—in a word, for us to ally for purely material and selfish ends—will be to make a covenant with death and a bid for national decay. It will be to trifle with a great moral opportunity, and bring a moral retribution swift and certain as the breath of destiny.

The present supremacy of the Anglo-Saxon race is due to the fact that it has cherished the loftiest ideals of conduct; and wherever it has pushed its way to power, it has accepted every fresh accession of influence or territory as a trust to be administered with wisdom and beneficence, and not as a power to be abused and turned to selfish ends. If the divine purpose in history be at all deducible from the operations of Divine Providence, then clearly to the English-speaking peoples has been committed the moral and social uplift of the race. Wherever the flag goes, there go freedom and honour and fair-play. The secret of this is found in the fact that, after all, the flag of England is merely the symbol of a Higher Power. Right in the centre of the Union Jack, and red as the

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Blood that flowed on Calvary, stands the Cross of the World's Christ. This is the secret of England's strength and stability, and so long as she is loyal to the Cross and all it stands for will she endure. With another and a broader meaning than that immediately conveyed by the poet, shall we not pray :

Rise, happy morn ! Rise, holy morn !
Draw forth the cheerful day from night ;
O Father, touch the EAST, and light
The Light that shone when Hope was born

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